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ABSTRACT

Selected current readings in the area of school reform are presented. Seven selections in "The Front Lines" focus on current developments in educational change in the political arena. A section on "Charter Schools" contains eight readings on the development and implementation of charter schools. A section titled "School Choice" contains six essays on parental school choice. A section on "Standards, Tests, and Accountability" contains eight articles on achievement tests, test results, and test use. "Teacher Talent" contains six selections on teacher education, certification, and teacher personnel policies. The "Curriculum & Pedagogy" section contains five selections on teaching methods and curriculum content. The final "Grab Bag" section contains five articles on various subjects, including Head Start, special education, bilingual education, and state educational budgets. The source of each selection is identified. (SLD)

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Selected Readings on School Reform

Fall 1998
Vol. 2, No. 4

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Fall 1998

Dear Education Reformer,

Greetings. School's back in and Washington is providing its own unique civics lesson. Beyond the Beltway, however, important work is underway in the world of school reform. Here's your quarterly dose of *Selected Readings on School Reform* to help catch you up.

This summer's highest profile school reform event was the release of the results of the Massachusetts teacher certification exam. Over 60% of would-be teachers flunked, sparking outrage from every corner of the country. We feature an extended investigation into the teacher quality problem in our "Teacher Talent" section. It's clear that the Massachusetts experience is not isolated.

The school choice front quieted down a bit from the Spring's historic happenings (the Wisconsin Supreme Court decision, the announcement of the $100 million Children's Scholarship Fund). Perhaps the most important recent development is further evidence that public opinion is shifting ever more in favor of school choice. In "Front Lines," we bring you an excerpt from the annual Phi Delta Kappan/Gallup education poll, which shows a majority of Americans now in favor of government funding for private schools.

This issue of $(SR)^2$ also serves up a healthy helping of meaty policy essays. Among our favorites: a chapter from Paul Hill's and Mary Beth Celio's excellent Brookings volume, *Fixing Urban Schools*; Christopher Jencks's and Meredith Phillips's *American Prospect* piece on closing the white-black achievement gap; and an original contribution from veteran California bilingual educator Richard Munro entitled "Bilingual Miseducation." You will also find a new *Public Interest* essay by my colleague, Mike Petrilli, and yours truly, "Washington Versus School Reform." It previews some of the issues (and possibilities) facing Congress during the upcoming re-authorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

We are lucky to have two able and energetic interns, Susan Flora and Jake Phillips, who did most of the heavy lifting on this issue. Susan is starting a public policy graduate program at American University while Jake is taking a semi-breather from his senior year at Duke. We're grateful for their help.

Have a terrific autumn. You'll hear from us again in January.

Sincerely,

Chester E. Finn, Jr.
President

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Education Reform

A New Era for Urban Education?

In this Brookings Institution *Policy Brief*, Diane Ravitch succinctly describes the challenges faced by today's troubled urban schools and the explosion of promising reforms designed to overcome them. In eight pages, Ravitch lays out the most compelling case for urban reform that we've ever seen.

She starts with some disturbing numbers, borrowed from last winter's *Quality Counts*. Achievement rates in high-poverty urban schools are dismal. Childhood poverty continues to grow. Teachers in urban schools are grievously under-qualified.

Yet many school boards and system bureaucracies spin their wheels. Everything is always changing, yet nothing—fundamentally—ever changes. Until now. Ravitch documents the fast growth of charter schools in urban areas. And she heralds the growing demand for vouchers for our neediest kids.

A New Era for Urban Education is a quick read and a solid introduction to the realities of urban reform. Get your copy by calling the Brookings bookstore at 202-797-6258, faxing a request to 202-797-6004, or surfing to www.brook.edu. It will cost you three dollars. •*MJP*

What's Wrong in America's Classrooms?

American students spend more time in school, receive more homework, and watch the same amount of television as their Japanese counterparts, yet their performance on international standardized tests falls far short. Beginning with the premise that something is sorely amiss in American schools, *What's Wrong in America's Classrooms*, edited by Williamson Evers, seeks to explain this shortcoming through an evaluation of how we educate our children.

A product of a February 1997 conference hosted by Stanford's Hoover Institution, this readable book serves as a handy guide to the culture wars in America's classrooms. It addresses a range of issues related to educational progressivism, including "whole language" reading and "new math" instruction. The volume's contributors include such heavyweights as E.D. Hirsch, Bill Honig, and Harold Stevenson.

What's Wrong in America's Classrooms? is available in bookstores (ISBN# 0-8179-9532-3) or through the Hoover Institution Press. Call them at 800-935-2282, fax a request to 650-723-1687, or surf to www.hoover.stanford.edu. It will cost you $17.95. •*JRP*

Why Congress Should Overhaul the Federal Regional Laboratories

Nina Shokraii Rees of the Heritage Foundation targets the regional "labs" in this recently published Heritage *Backgrounder*. She explains that, while the federal government could conceivably play a productive role in education research, these organizational dinosaurs fail that mission and are rife with inefficiency, shaky methodology, and faddishness.

Rees gives several examples of untested and fallacious strategies promulgated by the labs. Among them: whole language, "developmentally and culturally appropriate" classrooms, and "self-paced, inquiry-based" instruction (see *What's Wrong With America's Classrooms?*). Looking for the latest research on how to teach core knowledge or the impact of choice on urban schools? Don't look to the labs.

Part of the problem is the lack of competition. The 10 labs (which cost federal taxpayers more than $50 million annually) receive multi-year contracts for which there is seldom any competition. They also benefit from earmarked appropriations. And they scarf up federal dollars from all sorts of other "categorical" programs. Shokraii urges that their "exclusive franchise" on research be broken or that the research function be turned over to the states.

To see the report yourself, call Heritage at 202-546-4400 or surf to www.heritage.org. Ask for *Backgrounder* #1200. It's free. •*MJP*

Parental Choice

Learning from School Choice

Some books you just have to have on your shelf. This is one. Eight years ago, John Chubb and Terry Moe made the case for choice in their landmark Brookings volume, *Politics, Markets, and America's Schools*. Almost a decade later, editors Paul Peterson and Bryan Hassel have compiled, again for Brookings, truckloads of data from experiments with vouchers, charters, and public school choice. The findings back up Chubb and Moe's hypothesis: choice works.

After an introduction to the research on school choice by Peterson and that on charter schools by Hassel, the volume surveys the context of school reform, choice within public education, private school vouchers, and constitutional issues.

This is not a book for the casual reader. Wonkish, data-rich and encyclopedic, it delivers lots of numbers and nuanced arguments. But even if you've seen some of this research before, many of the essays are gems. Our favorites include an insightful look at how school choice can enhance civic participation (by Jay Greene) and a primer on the constitutional cases now winding through the courts (by Joseph Viteritti).

Learning from School Choice is available in bookstores (ISBN# 0-8157-7016-2) or through the Brookings Institution Press. Call Brookings at 202-797-6258, fax a request to 202-797-6004, or surf to www.brook.edu. The paperback sells for $19.95 and the hardback for $52.95. •*MJP*

Standards and Tests

Raising the Bar: A School Board Primer on Student Achievement

What makes this new report from the National School Boards Association so dangerous is how friendly it appears to the cause of boosting student achievement. In reality, it serves as yet another dazzling example of an education interest group co-opting the language of reform for purposes of its own.

The table of contents is appetizing: defining student achievement, the role of local school boards, a guide to testing, indicators of achievement, and an appendix on national groups involved in standards-based reform. And indeed there is *some* useful information provided, especially the lists of "strategic questions" that can help focus school boards on student achievement.

But the report is peppered with comments that strike at the heart of real standards-based school reform. (This isn't too surprising once you notice who authored the report: perennial establishment apologist Gerald Bracey and NSBA staffer Michael Resnick.) Here, for example, is an off-handed comment about NAEP achievement levels: "Many in education believed that the first attempt at setting such levels resulted in impossibly high standards, and many continue to believe that later levels are still unrealistically high." On the *Nation at Risk* concern that bad schools would lead to a declining economy: "That world view became very popular in the late 1980s, when the

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economy slid into recession and some version of the 'lousy-schools-are-producing-a-lousy-workforce-and-that-is-killing-us-in-the-global-market' theme could be heard in many quarters. Others, however, saw from the beginning that the link between the quality of America's schools and a weak economy is tenuous, at best."

The report completely blows its cover when it goes on to include the average age of textbooks, class size, and per-pupil expenditures as "other indicators of achievement." Once you've reached the appendix, "Opportunity to Learn Indicators," you know you're back to the same old story. But it's worse than that, because the publication's title and stated mission are so seductive.

This is not one for your shelf. But if you must have a look at *Raising the Bar,* call the National School Boards Association at 1-800-706-6722, fax 703-683-7590, surf to www.nsba.org, or email info@nsba.org. You'll be out $23. •*MJP*

Equivalency and Linkage of Educational Tests

Behind that boring title is an important report by the National Academy of Sciences that has near-term implications for President Clinton's "voluntary national test" (VNT) program, the fate of which hangs by a Congressional thread as we write.

As you may recall, part of last year's "compromise" on VNT was an assignment to the Academy to determine whether existing tests could be equated to each other and to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), thus permitting the reporting of student (and school, community, etc.) scores against NAEP scales and standards without imposing a new national test.

The short answer—and the Academy terms this an "interim report"—is that this cannot be done. Here's the key conclusion:

> Currently administered state and commercial achievement tests and NAEP vary significantly in terms of their content emphasis, type and difficulty of test questions, and the thought processes they require of students. In addition, these tests vary substantially in how and when they are administered, whether all students respond to the same sets of questions, how closely the tests are related to what is taught in school, how they are scored, and how the scores are reported and used.
>
> Therefore, the committee concludes that:
>
> - Comparing the full array of currently administered commercial and state achievement tests to one another, through the development of a single equivalency or linking scale, is not feasible.
> - Reporting individual student scores from the full array of state and commercial achievement tests on the NAEP scale, and transforming individual scores on these various tests and assessments into the NAEP achievement levels, is not feasible.

Assuming that this conclusion endures in the final report, and subject to the possibility that linkages might be developed "between specified subsets of these tests," one must conclude that the dream of using existing tests to yield scores that are comparable from one state or community to the next is in fact a dream. This has implications that go far beyond the Clinton proposal—but in the short run it also intensifies the drama over whether any form of NAEP-based national testing will go forward.

If you'd like to see for yourself, this 33-page report (ISBN# 0-309-06177-6) can be obtained from the National Academy Press, 2101

Constitution Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20418. You can call 800-624-6242 (or, in the Washington area, 202-334-3313) or go on-line to www.nap.edu. •*CEFjr*

Linking the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) and the Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS): Eighth-Grade Results

Well, it turns out some test scores *can* be "linked" to each other even though the tests are not identical. The National Center for Education Statistics has produced a pioneering study of links between the 1995 TIMSS results (for eighth grade) and the 1996 NAEP assessments of math and science (also for eighth grade). Evidently the links are precarious, however. The report is full of cautions and warnings. But what's here is also extremely interesting. In math, for example, each of the 44 states that took part in NAEP in 1996 can be compared—in average student performance—to the 41 TIMSS countries. Delving into the volume at random, one can see, for example, that twelve countries did better than Indiana's students, 10 did worse, and 19 (including the U.S. as a whole) were statistically similar to Indiana. For Virginia, 22 countries had higher scores, 5 had lower scores (Colombia, Iran, Kuwait, Portugal, South Africa). And so forth. The science presentation is similar: only one country (Singapore) did better than Iowa, but 27 nations scored higher than Louisiana.

We've heard that NCES may not attempt these comparisons again, so you may want to have a look at this one. The publication number is NCES 98-500. The NCES website is http//nces.ed.gov. And the project officer is Arnold Goldstein, whose phone number is 202-219-1741. •*CEFjr*

Teachers and Administrators

Good Teaching Matters: How Well-Qualified Teachers Can Close the Gap

Conventional wisdom since the Coleman report has held that schools are largely powerless to boost student achievement, especially for poor and minority kids. That's always been a misreading of Coleman, of course, but it's also justified a certain fatalism on the part of some educators. That's why it's good that the Education Trust, in its Summer 1998 edition of *Thinking K-16*, has summarized a number of recent studies showing that schools can indeed make a difference. The factor that turns out to be most significant in explaining variations in student achievement? Teacher quality. That, incidentally, is consistent with Coleman, but it's also hugely germane to today's ruckus about how to get better teachers.

Among the specific findings: students with the same initial achievement levels reach vastly different outcomes depending on whether they have been assigned effective or ineffective teachers. Teachers with high scores on a basic literacy exam are more likely to produce significant gains in student achievement. And a teacher's subject matter knowledge is strongly linked to pupil achievement in math and science.

These powerful studies are matched by a tragic reality: children in poor and minority communities tend to get the worst teachers. If they had teachers of the same quality as other children, Ed Trust argues, the achievement gaps between rich and poor students and between black and white students would mostly disappear.

This is a compelling booklet that will point you to some of today's best research on teacher quality. Obtain a free copy of *Teaching Matters* by writing Education Trust at 1725 K St., NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20006 or phoning them at 202-293-1217 and asking for the Summer

1998 edition of *Thinking K-16*. The report is free but shipping & handling will cost you $2.50. •*MBK*

Teachers Evaluating Teachers

When Bob Chase became President of the NEA, he started promoting the "new unionism" in response to mounting criticism of his organization. No longer accepting the classic "industrial" model of a trade union, Chase claimed that new unionism would place NEA at the forefront of education reform. In his new book, the tireless union watcher and critic Myron Lieberman hones in on the centerpiece of Chase's vision: peer review.

Lieberman evaluates this "reform" in theory and in practice, eventually concluding that it is neither new (Toledo has practiced peer review since 1981) nor especially effective. Moreover, while peer review tends to ingratiate teachers with administrators, he shows that there is no evidence that it boosts student performance.

Teachers Evaluating Teachers (ISBN# 1-56000-381-2) can be obtained for $36 in hardback or $23 in soft cover by writing the Education Policy Institute at 4401-A Connecticut Ave., NW, Washington, DC 20008, phoning 202-244-7535, or faxing 202-244-7584. •*JRP*

Collective Bargaining: Bringing Education to the Table

The Mackinac Center unmasks the dubious role of collective bargaining in education with this recent report. Author La Rae Munk, J.D., analyzes 583 Michigan labor contracts and finds much that's troubling.

Many of the agreements that Munk evaluated include mechanisms that stiffen work restrictions, dedicate resources to counterproductive uses, and exaggerate school board liability for teacher misdeeds. In response, she offers a series of common-sense solutions: abandon mandatory union dues payment, beware of "just cause" proceedings that make it difficult to fire teachers, and pay teachers according to performance rather than seniority.

Collective Bargaining is an interesting and thorough treatment of a complex topic. It can be obtained from the Mackinac Center for Public Policy by writing them at 140 W. Main St., P.O. Box 568, Midland, MI 48640, calling 517-631-9000, or faxing a request to 517-631-9064. •*JRP*

Professional Development for Standards-Based Education

This report, produced by the Mass(achusetts) Insight Education and Research Institute, focuses on aligning teacher education with upgraded academic standards. Now that most states have developed new standards, attention turns to holding students and schools accountable for reaching them. This study suggests that professional and staff development programs, as well as the tools by which teachers are evaluated and recertified, need to be restructured.

After laying the theoretical groundwork, the report provides examples of successful professional development programs—the kind that surmount the barriers of time, money, and collective bargaining. For anyone interested in performance-driven professional development, this report gives insightful background, sound examples, and several useful recommendations.

For further information or a copy of the report, write to Mass Insight Education and Research Institute, 1030 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge, MA 02138 or call them at 617-492-0580. They can also be reached via e-mail at insight@massinsight.com. The report is free. •*SMF*

The Superintendent of the Future

In the preface to this welcome book, editors Robert R. Spillane and Paul Regnier acknowledge that public schools have indeed changed over the last 30 years, with the pace of that change accelerating in the last 15. Yet the authors contend that superintendents have been more-or-less cut out of the reform conversation. They compiled this book to assist current and aspiring superintendents to take a more active role in the dialogue about the future direction of American education.

Drawing on their own wide and varied experiences, and the contributions of knowledgeable people in the field of school administration, Spillane and Regnier have produced a source-book that helps superintendents understand the nuts and bolts of their position while suggesting ways to build and maintain relationships with their community and school boards. Covering a variety of topics, from instruction to technology to personnel management, this book teaches superintendents how they can become more involved in critical education policy decisions while staying focused on academic learning.

Bud Spillane knows as much about the superintendency as anyone alive. His wisdom and experience–and those of his longtime colleague, Paul Regnier, are worth sharing. Look for *Superintendents of the Future* in your local bookstore or call Aspen Publishers at 800-638-8437, fax a request to 301-417-7650, email orders@aspenpubl.com, or surf to www.aspenpublishers.com. But it'll set you back $65.00 (for hard cover). •*SMF*

Statistics & Information

America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being

The Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics has released its second annual compendium on the well-being of America's children. The most recent statistics are provided—with the help of reader-friendly charts and graphs—on a broad range of topics, including population and family characteristics, economic security, health, education, behavior, and social environment.

The report is a useful compilation on issues relevant to children's welfare. Single copies are available free, while they last, from the National Maternal Child Health Clearinghouse at 2070 Chain Bridge Road, Suite 450, Vienna, VA 22182. You could also call 703-356-1964, or email nmchc@circsol.com. Or simply surf to http://childstats.gov. •*SMF*

School Wise Press Website

The School Wise Press, already well-established as publishers of school-related resources and "school guides," has created a new website to provide information to anyone who wants to get "school smart" about California schools. This parent-oriented site offers school rankings on a variety of topics, including test results, ethnic enrollments, and students per computer. Browsers can also read from their library of education articles, peruse their bookstore, ask experts questions on-line, or link to other educational and community sites. To keep up to date on educational issues, you can also search their "hot topics" section or participate in on-line discussion groups. You may not want to know so much about California but you might consider it a prototype for your own state or community. Have a look when on the web at www.schoolwisepress.com. •*SMF*

Education in the South

Miles to Go

From the Southern Education Foundation (SEF) comes their latest study on the condition of African-Americans in higher education. It focuses on the implementation of the Supreme Court decision, *U.S. v. Fordice* (1992), which required states to eradicate "vestiges of segregation." The well-publicized report concludes that "race remains a powerful and persistent barrier to the full and equal participation in higher education in the 19 states that previously operated segregated colleges and universities."

As a remedy to these barriers, the report proposes more of such familiar nostrums as aggressive affirmative action, more "race-sensitive" financial aid policies, and more money for under-performing historically black colleges. Meanwhile, it casts a suspicious eye at "threatening" elements in higher education today. Among these, the study identifies efforts to raise standards, offer merit scholarships, and eliminate remedial classes.

Miles to Go is useful insofar as it examines the present state of traditionally black institutions of higher education; however, it blunders in proposing, as reforms, the same measures that birthed the situation it laments. Copies are available by writing the Southern Education Foundation at 135 Auburn Ave., NE, Second Floor, Atlanta, GA 30303-2503 or calling 404-523-0001. The cost is $20.00. •*JRP*

Educational Progress in the South

The Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) presents another valuable review of Southern progress in education in its two reports, *Educational Benchmarks 1998* and *Education and Progress in the South*. The sixty-year time horizon makes for especially interesting reading—and for tons of progress on many fronts. For example, a higher proportion of Southerners graduated from *college* last year than graduated from *high school* sixty years ago. Still, the SREB makes clear that its part of the country has a considerable way to go. The performance of Southern states on the National Assessment of Educational Progress is particularly telling: while each of the states has improved over the past twenty years, virtually all remain stalled in the lower half on national rankings.

For the analyst, *Educational Benchmarks 1998* offers a greater wealth of information than the glossier *Education Progress in the South*. Both can be obtained by writing the Southern Regional Education Board at 592 Tenth St., NW, Atlanta, GA 30318-5790, calling 404-875-9211, faxing 404-872-1477, or surfing to www.sreb.org. •*JRP*

Network Notes are written by Chester E. Finn, Jr., Susan M. Flora, Marci B. Kanstoroom, Michael J. Petrilli, and John R. Phillips.

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Selected Readings on School Reform

The Front Lines

While the rumblings of Bimbroglio, as *The New Republic* calls it, dominated the national news, more pleasant sounds emerged from the education community over the late summer.

We open with a contribution from our own Checker Finn and Mike Petrilli entitled "Washington Versus School Reform." Writing in *The Public Interest*, Finn and Petrilli outline the federal role in public education today and suggest a three-pronged strategy to overhaul it: block grants, vouchers, and what they term "trust-busting."

The 30th Annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll on education was recently released. It shows, *inter alia*, growing consensus in favor of using public funds for school choice, including private education. In just five years, the percent of people favoring the idea has risen from 24% to 44% and opposition has fallen from 74% to 50%. We include the introduction from the *Phi Delta Kappan* poll, "Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools" by Lowell Rose and Alec Gallup.

Next, we feature Kevin Bushweller's "Do Takeovers Work?" from *The American School Board Journal*. After investigating three school districts, Bushweller answers his question in the affirmative, though with caveats.

Onward to Robert J. Samuelson's editorial, "The Wastage in Education," from *Newsweek*. From teacher training policies to academic standards to college admissions, Samuelson argues that, "[t]here is a flabbiness in our thinking that poses as high-mindedness. The result is a huge wastage that is ultimately measured in lost human potential."

Richard Lee Colvin's "California Struggles to Repair Its Troubled Schools" from *The Public Perspective* contributes a piercing analysis of the constant change in Golden State education policy. Colvin writes, "Teachers in particular are weary of the tiring cycle of reform, followed by neglect, followed by a new reform, each of which is introduced with high hopes and little follow-through."

Next, we include Chapter Five from Paul Hill and Mary Beth Celio's fine new Brookings book, *Fixing Urban Schools,* entitled "Creating Reforms that Can Work." Directed at political and business leaders who find themselves responsible for school systems, the chapter clarifies the plethora of policy proposals that fall under the heading of "urban education reform." (This book is worth getting. To order it, contact the Brookings Institution Press at 202-797-6258.)

We conclude this section with Anemona Hartocollis's *New York Times* article, "New York Offers 30% Raise if Principals Drop Tenure." The short version: the principals said no. Like habits, old protections are hard to break.

JRP

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SCHOOL REPORT (I)

Washington versus school reform

CHESTER E. FINN, JR. & MICHAEL J. PETRILLI

PROMISCUOUS" is an overused word in Washington these days, but it aptly describes the trend in federal education policy—both at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue and on Capitol Hill. The 1990s have seen the wanton transformation of innumerable education fads into new government programs. Since inauguration day, 1993, the Clinton administration alone has embraced dozens of novel education schemes, including subsidies for state academic standards, tax credits for school construction, paying for teachers to be appraised by a national standards board, hiring 100,000 new teachers to shrink class size, ensuring "equity" in textbooks, collecting gender-sensitive data on the pay of high-school coaches, boosting the self-esteem of rural students, establishing a Native Hawaiian Education Council, connecting every classroom to the Internet, developing before- and after-school programs, forging mentoring relationships between college students and middle schoolers, increasing the number of school drug-prevention counselors, requiring school uniforms, and fostering character education. "Superintendent

Clinton" has also supported the Family Involvement Partnership, the America Reads Partnership, Lighthouse Partnerships (for teacher training), HOPE Scholarships, Presidential Honors Scholarships, Americorps, Voluntary National Tests, Education Opportunity Zones, and Comprehensive School Reform Grants.

But policy promiscuity is not indulged by Clinton and the Democrats alone. Roving-eyed Republicans in Congress have proposed, inter alia, slashing class size, ending social promotion, legalizing school prayer, replacing textbooks with laptops, funding environmental education, paying for school metal detectors, and creating a new literacy program.

Root causes

As education has ascended the list of issues that trouble voters, politicians of every stripe have predictably lunged for it. This has led Washington officials to shoulder problems and embrace initiatives that once were deemed the proper province of states and communities (or individual schools and families). The arena of federal education policy resembles a vast flea market, where practically any program idea can be displayed and offered for purchase without regard to its soundness or effectiveness.

As at a flea market, there's plenty of old stuff hanging around, too. Once created, education programs seldom disappear, no matter how poorly they accomplish their stated purposes and no matter what harm they may do along the way. It's not that their authorizers and appropriators are ignorant. The major programs have been evaluated time and again. Countless studies have shown that most of them, for all their laudable ambitions and fine-sounding titles, do little or no good. What then accounts for this reckless behavior?

To begin with, there is the ceaseless clamor for someone to do something. Education is clearly a problem that voters want solved. The simplest way to give at least the appearance of action is to propose another program. Of course, this impulse isn't confined to Washington. Many governors, legislators, mayors, and aldermen have spent their way into citizens' hearts with pricey education programs. As the 1998 election draws closer, reports the *Washington Post*, local, state, and national candidates of both parties are stumbling over one another with promises to shrink third-grade classes, build new classrooms, launch after-school programs, etc.

Another contributing factor is the political class's devotion to focus groups and polls. The public is not sure how to reform education and rather naïve about the real problems. The easiest, surest way to appeal to such voters is to offer instant solutions, like shrinking classes or refurbishing buildings, which won't actually solve any real problems. But one does thereby avoid being called "anti-education"—a label slapped on those who would overhaul or scrap some dysfunctional program or disrupt an established interest.

Then there is the problem of policy gridlock. One serious reform strategy focuses on standards and accountability; the other on school choice and diversification. It's not hard to design a shrewd blend, combining national standards with radical decentralization and merging tough accountability measures with school choice. But politicians with an eye on their "base"—or an upcoming primary—won't yield an inch on their pet schemes and aversions. Unable to reach agreement on genuine reforms, they reach instead for crowd-pleasers.

Finally, because Washington plays, in the end, such a marginal role in education, it feels free to do as it pleases. Washington furnishes just 7 percent of the K-12 education budget. Federal officials know very well that nothing they do will have great impact. Since they're not ultimately responsible for what happens in the schools, heedlessness comes easy to them. They rarely behave quite so immaturely in policy areas where Uncle Sam plays the lead role, such as national defense, Social Security, and international trade.

How we got here

Because the Constitution assigns Washington no responsibility whatsoever for education, the federal role is guided by no general principles. It just grew. Though some early federal involvement can be found as far back as the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 and the creation of land-grant colleges in 1862, the federal role in education is essentially a late twentieth-century design. Indeed, save for vocational education, the G.I. bill, the post-Sputnik "national defense education act," and, of course, the judiciary's deep involvement in school desegregation, the federal role in education is a creation of the mid 1960s, of Lyndon Johnson's Great Society.

The major legislation of the day included Head Start (1964), the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1965), the Higher Education Act (1965), the Bilingual Education Act (1968), and, soon after, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (1975). All these programs sought to expand access to education for needy or impoverished segments of the population—and to disguise general aid to schools as help for the disadvantaged. The dozens of programs created by these five statutes (and their subsequent re-authorizations) script the federal role in education today.

That role will soon be up for review. The 106th Congress will reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (E.S.E.A.) and its $11 billion worth of programs, accounting for fully one-third of the Education Department's budget. Out of 69 K-12 programs currently administered by that agency, 47 are authorized by E.S.E.A. Title I, the largest of them at nearly $8 billion, is included, as are bilingual education, safe and drug-free schools, the Eisenhower professional development program, and scores more.

These programs mostly began under Lyndon Johnson (and until now no Republican Congress has had a crack at them), but they have enjoyed bipartisan support. Richard Nixon presided over a significant expansion of aid to college students. Gerald Ford signed the burdensome "special education" bill into law. The Reagan and Bush administrations proposed to return control to states and localities. They found early success—federal K-12 education spending declined 21 percent in real terms between 1980 and 1985. But funding for these programs then skyrocketed 28 percent from 1985 to 1992, and another 14 percent during Clinton's first term.

Their complexity grew, too. The 1994 version of the E.S.E.A.—passed just a few weeks before the GOP won control of Congress—took up over 1,000 pages. Today, the federal government spends $100 billion per year on over 700 education programs spanning 39 agencies. The Department of Education manages roughly one-third of this money and employs close to 5,000 people.

Changing problems, unchanging programs

The assumptions underlying federal involvement in education have not changed since LBJ occupied the Oval Office. Increasing access to more and more services—rather than boosting achievement and productivity—is the primary mission. States and localities are assumed to be unjust, stingy, and stubborn. Top-down regulations and financial incentives are assumed to be the surest ways to induce change. And Uncle Sam's primary clients are assumed to be school systems, not states and municipalities, and certainly not children and families.

It's remarkable how stable these assumptions have been despite 30-plus years of failure. America's schools remain perilously weak. Whether one looks at worldwide math and science results, comparisons of "value added" over time, or other indices of achievement, America's schools simply don't measure up—except in spending, where U.S. outlays per-pupil are among the planet's loftiest. Domestically, our National Assessment results are mediocre to dismal, and the achievement (and school-completion) levels for minority youngsters and inner-city residents are catastrophic. In Ohio, for example, the school districts of Cleveland, Youngstown, and Dayton are all posting drop-out rates of greater than 40 percent. Nationally, a staggering 77 percent of fourth-graders from high-poverty urban schools cannot read at a basic level. The achievement gap between the rich and poor, and between whites and minorities, has not closed; it may even be growing. After three decades, billions of dollars, and thousands of pages of statutes and regulations, we have astonishingly little to show for the effort.

One might think policy makers would take notice. One might suppose they would demand a fundamental overhaul, a thorough hosing-out of this Augean stable of feckless programs and greedy interest groups. But one would be wrong. In a spectacular example of throwing good money after bad and refusing to learn from either experience or research, the scores of education proposals made within the past few years simply extend—indeed deepen—the familiar trend.

The recent proposals and new programs don't sound exactly like the old ones. Today's programs are generally mooted in phrases favored by focus groups, such as "comprehensive services," "mentoring," and "literacy." But the basic approach is the same. Most of them fall under three headings: "partnerships," which mask government activism under complex organizational links; the extension of services into new domains; and the adoption by Uncle Sam of duties and responsibilities that were once the province of states and communities.

From partnerships to entanglements

"Partnership," the pollsters assure us, is a "warm" term that focus groups adore. Upon examination, though, most "partnerships" turn out to resemble what used to be called "bureaucracies." Consider the "Lighthouse Partnerships" for teacher training, proposed by the Clinton administration and supported by several Republicans (and soon to be enacted). Washington's dollars would allow "model" colleges of education to "partner" with weaker ones. They would also "partner" with state education agencies, local school districts, and nonprofit organizations. All these new partners would supposedly work together to improve teacher training.

Nobody can quite explain why federal funding is necessary for them to cooperate. They are all supposed to be improving teacher training in the first place. Nor is it clear that anything real will result from their newly subsidized bonding. Will teachers be tested on more difficult material? Will schools of education be held accountable for producing teachers who know their stuff? Will students learn more? No one can be sure, since the stated mission of the program is simply to encourage institutions to hook up with one another. What is certain is that teacher training colleges and other pillars of the education establishment will reap added financial benefits. The traditional monopoly will be strengthened, and the teacher quality problem, far from being solved, will likely be exacerbated.

In addition to partnerships, politicians are also pushing programs that expand the mission of the public schools into new terrain. President Clinton recently trotted out a proposal to support "community learning centers" that tutor students and provide them with a safe place to go after school. It's hard to fault the impulse. (Though like most "compensatory" efforts, it overlooks the real problem—namely, that most public schools close by 3 p.m.) But is there a compelling reason for the federal government to fund them? And won't Uncle Sam's embrace prove to be a chokehold?

One thing we have learned over the years is that regulatory entanglements follow federal funding. New programs bring unaccustomed mandates, fresh conditions, and additional rules. We'll wake up one day to learn that the new after-school centers must be accredited or staffed by certified teachers (or unionized teachers); that they can be sponsored only by secular organizations; that their buildings must be built or rehabilitated by workers paid the "prevailing" union wage; that they will have to teach "diversity" and "conflict resolution," or environmentalism, or esteem-building via "cooperative learning."

Are there compelling benefits that outweigh these costs? We have not spotted any. The only real asset Washington has to offer to education is money. But, at present, the states have more of that than they need. Their combined surplus was estimated by the National Conference of State Legislatures at $28.3 billion for FY 1997. With so many dollars floating around, why burden worthy programs with Washington-style red tape? States, philanthropies, and local communities could easily create after-school havens for kids and recruit tutors for those who need help. Why must the Department of Education grow a "bureau of community learning centers" to manage this process?

The "me too" feds

Far from being stodgy, recalcitrant, and ignorant, the states today are bubbling labs of education reform and innovation. Information about promising programs gets around the country in a flash. A few years ago, no states produced school-by-school "report cards"; now at least a dozen do. Five years ago, only eight states had charter-school laws. Today, 33 have enacted them. This copycat behavior can be seen even at the municipal level. Chicago's successful accountability plan—ending social promotion and requiring summer school for those who failed—is being mimicked by dozens of communities, just as Chicago's dramatic new school-governance scheme (with the mayor in charge) is being adapted for use in other communities. Yet the tendency in Washington is still to nationalize problems and programs that states and communities are capable of tackling.

When, for example, did class size become a federal issue? It's states and communities that hire and pay teachers. It's states and communities that make the trade-offs, deciding, for example, whether they would prefer a large number of inexperienced, low-cost teachers or a smaller number of pricey veterans. Long before Clinton (and, for the Republicans, Congressman Bill Paxon) decided that smaller classes are better, several states were headed this way on their own. And, while the idea of reducing class size is undeniably popular with parents, its efficacy is uncertain and its unintended consequences numerous. Pete Wilson's class-size reduction plan for California, for example, prompted a mass exodus of experienced teachers from inner-city schools to posh suburbs, leaving disadvantaged kids with even less qualified teachers than before. Teacher shortages are now rampant, and thousands of people have received "emergency waivers." Instead of remedying the real teacher crisis—the lack of knowledgeable instructors—it has made the situation worse.

Research on class size is also inconclusive. Most studies show no systematic link between smaller classes and higher achieving pupils. The versions that seem to yield the greatest gains are those that slash class size below 15 kids. Such an expensive proposition must be weighed against the opportunity costs of other programs, strategies, or initiatives that could be funded. Some communities might decide that the price is worth it while others would rather use their dollars in different ways. Clinton's across-the-nation plan does not allow for such delicate and decentralized decision making. While the president often uses words like "autonomy" and "accountability," his proposal would micro-manage school staffing and budget priorities from Washington.

Once upon a time, Uncle Sam provided some real leadership in educational innovation. Now that the states are taking charge, the feds appear disoriented, playing "me too"—and not just with respect to class size. From ending social promotion, to adopting school uniforms, to implementing accountability systems, Washington is simply following in the footsteps of innovative state and local officials.

A chance to repent

A rare opportunity is at hand for a top-to-bottom overhaul. The public seems ready for fundamental reforms in education and, indeed, is getting a taste of them at the grassroots level. There we can glimpse higher standards, tougher accountability systems, new institutional forms, and profound power shifts. Surveys make it plain that voters, taxpayers, and parents are hungry for charter schools, for tougher discipline, for more attention to basic skills, and for school choice. Privately funded voucher programs are booming: Hundreds of millions of philanthropic dollars are now being lavished on them and thousands of children wait in queues to participate. Two cities have publicly funded voucher programs, and more will follow soon. Charter schools are spreading like kudzu. And opinion leaders—from newspaper columnists to business leaders to college presidents—are signaling their own readiness to try something different.

Into this shifting landscape will soon drop the periodic reauthorization of the E.S.E.A. The federal role in education could be almost entirely reshaped via this one piece of legislation. But will it be? Plenty of political obstacles block the path to a true overhaul. Three decades of doing things one way creates huge inertia, and every program, indeed every line in this endless statute, now serves an entrenched interest. Still, that was also true of welfare a few years back, and Washington was able to muster the will and imagination to change it once policy makers understood that the old arrangements had failed. What would a different approach to the federal role in K-12 education look like? We see three basic strategies: block grants, vouchers, and trust busting.

Instead of myriad categorical programs, each with its own regulations and incentives to prod or tempt sluggish states and cities into doing right by children, what about trusting the states (or localities) with the money? Do federal officials really know better than governors and mayors what the top education reform priorities of Utica or Houston or Baltimore should be? The block-grant strategy rests on the belief that, while states and communities may crave financial help from Washington to solve their education problems, they don't need to be told what to do.

Block grants can be fashioned without cutting aid dollars at all. (Indeed, by reducing the overhead and transaction costs of dozens of separate, fussy programs, they should enable more of the available resources to go directly to the children.) Block grants amalgamate the funding of several programs and hand it to states or communities in lump sums that can be spent on a wide range of locally determined needs. In so doing, they dissolve meddlesome categorical programs into pools of money.

Block grants also rid the nation of harmful programs, which get dissolved in the same pools. Do federal taxpayers really need to be funding the development of TV shows for kids? How about the sustenance of "model" gender-equity programs? Are "regional education laboratories" still needed to disseminate reform ideas in the age of the Internet?

Block grants come in every imaginable size and shape. If all the programs in E.S.E.A. were combined into one, at 1999 appropriation levels, the average state would receive $220 million per annum to use as it saw fit. Earlier this year, the Senate passed a somewhat smaller block grant designed by Washington state's Slade Gorton, which assembled some 21 categorical programs into a block grant totaling $10.3 billion. (Facing a Clinton veto threat, it was later deleted by Senate-House conferees.)

Voucher power

While block grants hand money and power back to the states, vouchers empower families directly. Instead of writing 50 checks, Washington would send millions of them straight to children and their parents, thus helping them meet their education needs as they see fit.

This is already standard practice in federal *higher* education policy, where an historic choice was made in 1972: Students rather than colleges became the main recipients of federal aid. A low-income college student establishes his own eligibility for a Pell Grant (or Stafford Loan, etc.) and then carries it with him to the college of his choice. That might mean Stanford or Michigan State, Assumption College or the Acme Truck Driving School. The institution only gets its hands on the cash if it attracts and retains the student.

The same thing could be done with federal programs meant to aid needy elementary and secondary students. The Title I program, for example, spends almost $8 billion annually to provide "compensatory" education to some 6.5 million low-income youngsters. That's about $1,250 apiece. What if the money went straight to those families to purchase their compensatory education wherever they like, from their public or private school, to be sure, but also from a commercial tutoring service, a software company, or the local public library? Title I would turn into millions of mini-scholarships. A similar approach could be taken to any program where individual students' eligibility is based on specific conditions, such as limited English proficiency, disability, etc.

The argument for vouchers is that a program designed to help people in need should channel the resources directly to them, not to institutions, intermediaries, or experts. Giving families cash empowers them while also building incentives for providers to develop appealing, effective programs. Furthermore, they make disadvantaged children financially attractive to schools and other service providers. The question most often asked about vouchers is whether families can be trusted to do right by their own children. We think the answer is usually yes—and experience with publicly and privately funded voucher plans all over the country seems to confirm that intuition.

How about the administrative headache of linking the federal government directly to millions of families? Such huge direct-grant programs as Social Security and veterans' benefits show that this can be done. But it's still an invitation to bureaucracy. Alternatives to direct relationships between Uncle Sam and millions of children and families include a hybrid strategy of vouchers and block grants which would turn the money over to states for *them* to hand out in the form of vouchers. Or the whole process could be handed over to private financial-services managers (much like the new welfare-services providers).

Bust the trusts

While the first two strategies loosen Uncle Sam's grip and shift power away from Washington, the third demands vigorous federal action. It calls for Big Government to tackle Big Education. Think of it as trust busting.

Even if all federal programs were block granted or voucherized, after all, the present power structure would still be in charge. School administrators, teachers' unions, colleges of education, and similar groups have erected a fortress that devolution may slightly weaken but will not vanquish. Lisa Graham Keegan, Arizona's crusading Superintendent of Public Instruction, understands this all too well. By pressing for charter schools, for school choice, for capital dollars "strapped to the back" of individual children, and for tough statewide standards, she has started to break the establishment's grip on education. Keegan recognizes, as David Brooks recently reported in the *Weekly Standard*, that "if you really want to dismantle the welfare state, you need a period of activist government; you need to centralize authority in order to bust entrenched interests."

What education "trusts" need busting? Our first candidate is the information monopoly. Education consumers in most of the United States lack ready access to reliable, intelligible information about student, teacher, and school performance. By manipulating the information, the establishment hides the seriousness of the problem. While most Americans know the education system is in trouble, they also believe that their local school serves its students well. This is the misinformation machine at work. There's a need for the education equivalent of an independent audit—and that's a legitimate role for the federal government, though one that many Republicans in Congress have so far been loath to permit.

Next, we would go after the teacher training monopoly. Due to state licensure rules, virtually all public school teachers must march through colleges of education en route to the classroom. As indicated by Massachusetts's recent teacher-testing debacle (over 60 percent of those taking the Commonwealth's new certification test flunked), those campuses aren't even teaching the rudiments. Institutions other than traditional education schools should be allowed to prepare future teachers. Knowledgeable individuals should be allowed to bypass formal teacher training altogether. And nobody who has failed to master his subject matter should enter the classroom at all. Federal programs—including grants and loans to college students—could wield considerable leverage in this area.

Finally, local public school monopolies need competitors. Entities besides local school boards and state bureaucracies should be allowed to create and run schools. Private and nonprofit managers should be encouraged to do so. Any school that is open to the public, paid for by the public, and accountable to public authorities for its performance should be deemed a "public school" and be found eligible for all forms of federal aid.

Vigorous trust busting undeniably smacks of Big Government. It's as much a Washington-knows-best strategy as was the Great Society. But it directs that strategy against the genuine problems of 1998, rather than the vestigial problems of 1965.

The next welfare reform?

If 33 years of history are any guide, the upcoming E.S.E.A. reauthorization cycle will most likely produce no more than minor tweaking of longstanding programs and the addition of several new ones. Changing that outcome will require a level of policy imagination and political courage all too rare today. But it's not out of the question. It happened with welfare reform in 1996, and it could happen with education in the near future. Rebuilt atop the triple foundation of block grants, vouchers, and trust busting, E.S.E.A. too could be brought into the modern era. It might even begin to do some good, helping children in need, rather than merely feeding greedy interest groups.

The 30th Annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools (excerpts)

By Lowell C. Rose and Alec M. Gallup

INTRODUCTION TO THE POLL

THE 1998 Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools includes a special focus on public funding for private and church-related schools. Along with the traditional trend questions in this area, new questions were asked regarding vouchers and tuition tax credits.

The public continues to oppose allowing students and parents to choose a private school to attend at public expense, with 44% in favor and 50% opposed. However, the public favors (51% to 45%) allowing parents to send their school-age children to any public, private, or church-related school if the government pays all or part of the tuition.

Two new questions were asked about vouchers, government-issued notes that parents can use to pay all or part of the tuition at a private or church-related school. Regarding a voucher that would pay all of the tuition, 48% of respondents are in favor, and 46% are opposed. When the question states that only part of the tuition would be paid, the proportion of respondents in favor rises to 52%, while the proportion who are opposed drops to 41%.

Two questions were asked regarding the obligations that should be assumed by private or church-related schools that accept government tuition payments. In response to the first question, 75% of respondents say that schools accepting such payments should be accountable to the state in the same way the public schools are accountable. In the second question, 70% say that nonpublic schools accepting public funds should be required to accept students from a wider range of backgrounds and academic ability than is now generally the case.

New questions were also asked about tuition tax credits, which would allow parents who send their children to private or church-related schools to recover all or part of the tuition paid. When the question mentions recovery of all tuition paid, 56% favor such credits, and 42% are opposed. When the question limits the credit to part of the tuition paid, 66% favor the credits, and 30% are opposed.

What do the results of this series of questions tell us? The public is deeply divided over the issue of funds going directly to private or church-related schools. Responses split almost evenly when the question implies that the public would pay all of the costs. The opposition seems to lessen when public schools are listed as a part of the choice option and when the funding provided pays only part of the cost. Tax credits for parents who send their children to private or church-related schools are supported by the public, but that support is greater if the credit covers only part of the tuition. Moreover, funding for private or church-related schools is conditioned on the willingness of those schools to be accountable in the same way the public schools are accountable.

The findings appear to guarantee that the issue of public funding for church-related schools will be a battleground for the foreseeable future. The public's willingness to consider aid to private and church-related schools in various forms will certainly encourage those who want to see such aid provided. By the same token, the public's seeming unwillingness to provide all of the tuition involved in such programs reinforces the belief of opponents of such aid that the "haves" will be the ones who can take advantage of such programs and that the "have-nots" will be the ones left behind. The battle would seem to be joined along those lines.

With this in mind, the 1998 poll repeated an earlier question in which public school parents were asked what they would do if given the option of sending their oldest child to any public, private, or church-related school, with the tuition paid by the government. Fifty-one percent of respondents indicate that they would choose their present public school. Another 6% would choose a different public school, bringing to 57% the number of families that would remain in the public school system. Thirty-nine percent would choose a private or church-related school. Clearly, this is an issue that could affect the future of the public schools.

The poll also sought to determine the confidence Americans have in the public schools as an institution and the priority the public places on improving these schools. When asked about the amount of confidence they have in the public schools, 42% of Americans say a great deal or quite a lot of confidence. Only the church or organized religion, with a combined rating of 57%, tops the public schools. Institutions in which the public expresses less confidence include local government (a combined 37%), state government (36%), big business (31%), national government (30%), the criminal justice system (29%), and organized labor (26%).

Regarding the priority the public places on improving the public schools, respondents were asked what the states should do with the surpluses they are accumulating as a result of the booming economy. Fifty percent of respondents say spend it on the public schools, 31% say use it to reduce taxes, 14% say build a "rainy day" fund, and 4% say spend it on other state services.

This being an election year, respondents were asked which of the two major political parties they feel is more interested in improving public education. Thirty-nine percent name the Democratic Party, and 28% name the Republican Party. The corresponding percentages in 1996 were 44% and 27%. In an interesting political twist, the breakdown of responses to the voucher question that stated that all tuition would be paid at a private or church-related school shows that 47% of Republicans favor such vouchers, and 48% oppose them. This statistical tie is surprising given the fact that the Republican Party is generally regarded as the party of vouchers. The picture becomes more interesting when one notes that Democrats, those from the party viewed as standing in opposition to vouchers, favor the same voucher plan by 51% to 43%. The party messages do not seem to be reaching the party faithful.

In another question, about programs with clear connections to political parties, the issues of providing funds to repair and replace older school buildings and providing funds to reduce class size in grades 1, 2, and 3 -

two programs associated with the Democratic Party - drew support from 86% and 80% of respondents respectively. Giving states block grants from which to fund some of the current federal programs and allowing parents to set up tax-free savings accounts to be used to pay tuition and other expenses at private or church-related schools - two programs associated with the Republican Party - drew support from 73% and 68% respectively.

Other findings in the 1998 Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup poll include the following.

-- Forty-six percent of the respondents give the schools in their own community a grade of A or B. This figure increases to 52% among public school parents and to 62% when public school parents are asked to grade the school their oldest child attends.

-- Americans are undecided as to whether children today get a better education than they received. Forty-one percent believe children today get a better education, 48% believe it is worse, and 8% believe there is no difference. Public school parents believe the education children get today is better by 49% to 43%.

-- Approximately half of the respondents (49%) believe that the public schools in the community are about the right size. However, a significant number (30%) believe they are too big. A majority (58%) would like a child of theirs to attend a high school with less than 1,000 students.

-- Almost two-thirds of respondents (62%) believe that schools in their communities are taking the necessary steps to promote understanding and tolerance among students of different racial and ethnic backgrounds.

-- Fifty percent of public school parents believe that school has caused their child to become an eager learner, 34% believe it has caused their child to tolerate learning as a necessary chore, and 15% believe it has caused their child to be turned off to learning.

-- The percentage of Americans who believe that public school parents should have more say in such aspects of school operation as selection and hiring of teachers and administrators, setting of their salaries, and selection of books for school libraries has increased significantly since the question was first asked in 1990.

-- There is significant public support (71%) for a voluntary national testing program, administered by the federal government, that would routinely test fourth- and eighth-grade students in order to measure the performance of the nation's public schools.

-- Support for amending the U.S. Constitution to permit prayers to be spoken in the public schools remains strong, with 67% of the respondents in favor.

-- The public is undecided regarding the way schools should deal with non-English-speaking students. Proposals calling for tutoring in English, providing instruction in the students' native language, and requiring students to learn English before receiving instruction in other subjects each draw support from roughly one respondent in three.

-- The public is undecided about the best way to finance schools: 21% believe the means should be by local property taxes; 33%, state taxes; and 37%, federal taxes.

-- Fifty percent of respondents believe that the quality of public schools is related to the amount of money spent on students in these schools.

-- Sixty-three percent of public school parents say they do not fear for the safety of their oldest child when he or she is at school. This figure is down from 69% in 1977. Similarly, 68% say they do not fear for the safety of their oldest child when he or she is outside at play in the neighborhood.

-- Almost two-thirds (65%) of respondents believe students with learning problems should be put in special classes.

-- Eighty-seven percent of those surveyed believe sex education should be included in high school instructional programs. The respondents expressed strong support for presenting virtually all topics, including AIDS, homosexuality, and teen pregnancy.

-- There is strong support for improving the nation's inner-city schools, with two-thirds of the public (66%) indicating a willingness to pay more taxes to provide the funds to do so.

-- Public opinion is divided about the impact that unions have had on the quality of public education: 37% believe they have made no difference; 27% believe they have helped it; 26% believe they have hurt it.

-- Almost three-fourths of respondents (73%) believe themselves to be either well informed or fairly well informed regarding local public schools.

(Editor's Note - Due allowance should be made for findings based on relatively small samples, e.g., nonpublic school parents. The sample for this group this year consists of only 33 respondents ans is, therefore, subject to a sampling error of plus or minus 17 percentage points)

The American School Board Journal, August 1998

Under the Shadow of the State: Do Takeovers Work?

By Kevin Bushweller

NO self-respecting school board member relishes the idea of working under the shadow of state-appointed administrators. Stripped of their powers and embarrassed in the public eye, board members are, at best, demoted to an advisory role. Sometimes they're fired from their positions outright.

But beyond the embarrassment—beyond, even, the politics, legalities, and lofty goals of state takeovers—lies an important question: Do takeovers work? "That's the $10 million question," says Christine Johnson of the Education Commission of the States. The answer has implications for school districts across the country, from New York City's changing suburbs to Kentucky's hill country to Los Angeles' overcrowded barrios. Even districts not in jeopardy of being taken over can take lessons from school systems that have struggled through this form of accountability.

With that in mind, *The American School Board Journal* examined the experiences of three districts: Logan County, W.Va.; Compton, Calif.; and Jersey City, N.J.

Logan County: Changing a culture of failure

Minutes before John Myers was sworn in as the state-appointed superintendent of the Logan County, W.Va., schools, two board members walked out of the meeting to protest the state's takeover of their district. The local newspaper criticized Myers' presence, and teachers were skeptical of his ability to lead the schools out of institutional failure. "You could cut the tension with a knife," one board member recalls.

That was 1992.

Four years later, Logan County had rebounded from years of academic failure and financial mismanagement. When the district returned to local control, the board hired Myers to run the district for another year.

Logan is a district of 7,200 students tucked in a valley in the Appalachian Mountains, where college-educated parents are rare and many parents dropped out of high school to work in the coal mines. Now that the mining jobs have disappeared, many people are unemployed or working in low-paying jobs.

In a struggling local economy, the district didn't even have enough money to hire substitute teachers. So lessons were skipped as teachers baby-sat two or three classes at a time in gymnasiums and cafeterias. An alarmingly high number of teachers were teaching subjects they were not certified to teach, and most had a poor grasp of how to align what they taught with what was being tested by the state. To make matters worse, there was no system in place to prevent rampant cronyism, both on the part of school board members and district administrators, according to state education officials. As a consequence, state officials say, people were hired—or given the best jobs in the district—without much concern for the quality of their skills.

On the eve of the takeover, 71 percent of elementary schools and 55 percent of secondary schools scored below the 50th percentile on state standardized tests. School attendance had fallen below 90 percent in nine of the district's schools, and the dropout rate at Logan High School was 24 percent.

When the state returned the district to local control four years later, all of the schools were scoring above the 50th percentile and had attendance rates of 90 percent or better. Logan High School's dropout rate plummeted to 10 percent. The news hasn't been all good: The dropout rate increased from 7 percent to 10 percent at another high school and remained unchanged at 14 percent at another. But there's been enough success to make other districts wonder: How did they do it?

Myers says Logan's success can be replicated, regardless of a district's size or demographic composition—and without a major infusion of state cash. The state contributed an extra $20,000—the difference between the former superintendent's salary and Myers' salary. That was it.

"In all honesty, there weren't a lot of big things that happened," says Myers, who recently retired as superintendent in Marion County, W.Va. "It was the Vince Lombardi approach: We tried to take the things we had and make them better."

Eight to 10 problems were identified each year, he says. Once they were fixed, the district moved on to the next eight to 10 problems. "If we just went after everything immediately, at the end of four years, we'd still have 40 problems," Myers says.

Everything was done with an eye toward improving student achievement. The district worked hard, for instance, to provide teachers with the training they needed to be certified in the subjects they were teaching. A great deal of professional development also focused on teaching teachers how to align their lessons with state academic standards. A new tax levy—and pared-down bureaucracy—helped pay for these and other necessities.

"The critical part . . . is that we never attempted to do away with the local board," says Hank Marockie, West Virginia's state superintendent. "If you start in that direction, it's a disaster." The board was demoted to an advisory role, but it continued to hold monthly meetings.

Myers made the final decisions on all matters relating to the school budget, personnel, and curriculum. But he says he often revised his ideas after consulting the board. And he allowed the board to make important decisions on school closings, transportation, and maintenance.

The board, in turn, began to work more cooperatively with Myers, who says it would have been much more difficult to turn the district around if he had to deal with a chronically adversarial board.

Now that Logan has resumed local control, Marockie says there is a danger that the district could slip back into its old habits. But he believes that is unlikely because Logan's educational culture no longer expects failure.

That doesn't mean Logan's problems are over. With declining enrollment and less state aid, the district is struggling to keep good teachers. And Ann Grimmett, president of the Logan County Education Association, says the district is already sinking back into "good ole boy" politics, putting people in positions of leadership for political reasons. "I wish the state were back," she says. "We've just gone downhill. My prediction is the state will be right back over here."

But board member Paul Hardesty, re-elected this spring to a second four-year term, is convinced the old ways are gone for good: "We went from the old way of doing things to the new way. The buddy-buddy factor is out, and efficiency is in. If we don't do our jobs in an efficient manner, ultimately, the students will suffer."

Compton: Solving a governance nightmare

The more he talks about the state's presence in his district, the more you hear the anger in Saul Lankster's voice. Clearly, the Compton board member sees the state as an occupying enemy, violating citizens' constitutional rights. He wants state officials to "get the hell out of here."

Initially, the state took over this Los Angeles County district because it was financially bankrupt, but state officials have extended their reach to include student achievement, in hopes of raising test scores that for years have trailed behind the rest of the state. The district's 29,400 students are primarily black and Hispanic, providing a clash of cultures that has sparked racial tension in schools as well as at board meetings.

Since the state took control of the district in 1993, Compton's elected board has continued to hold monthly meetings, but all its decisions are subject to review and veto by a state-appointed superintendent. The state has handpicked five new superintendents in five years—a turnover rate that has made the community suspicious of the state's commitment and knowledge of what's good for Compton.

Someone reportedly fired a gun at the first state-appointed superintendent soon after he assumed office in 1993. Since then, California Highway Patrolmen have been assigned to serve as bodyguards for every Compton superintendent. The latest is Randolph Ward, an African American who is fluent in Spanish. Ward has held the post for 19 months, but he's not sure how much longer he'll stay: "It's a very difficult position."

Consistency in the superintendent's office is important, says Tom Hollister, executive director of the Compton Education Association. "Not a whole lot was done in the first four years," he says, but "things are getting better," now that Ward is focusing on improving financial accountability, academic achievement, and relationships with both the teachers union and the community.

Under Ward's tenure, the district has extended the school year by 39 days for up to 4,000 of the district's neediest students, who are placed in eight-week accelerated learning programs every summer. During the 1997-98 school year, all first- and second-grade classes were reduced to 20 students per teacher, and $2 million in new textbooks were placed in schools.

The payoffs are emerging. The district's test scores—among the lowest in the state—have risen slightly in some years, and dropped in others, since the state took over in 1993. But in June, the district reported that student reading scores on a state achievement test increased an average of 34 percent from the previous year. Every grade improved its scores, except for 11th-graders, who posted an 8 percent decline.

Evidence of small but steady progress is showing up in other areas, too. Although still double the state average, the district's dropout rate has dipped from 8.7 percent to 8.3 percent. The attendance rate, which once ranged from 82 percent to 89 percent, depending on the school, now ranges from 90 percent to 96 percent. And campus crime dropped 59 percent, according to the last six-month reporting period.

Yet troubles remain. More than half of Compton's teachers have left the district since the state takeover, according to the union. Last year, 19 of 36 teachers at one elementary school decided to leave. Roughly 40 percent of the current teaching force is working with "emergency" credentials, meaning they have not completed their required training.

Some of the biggest troubles are on the board itself. Board meetings are "unlike anything I've ever seen," Hollister says. "They're very ugly"—with board members bickering among themselves and people in the audience mocking the Hispanic accent of the board president. One board member was arrested at a June meeting for disturbing the peace. She reportedly yanked the microphone out of Ward's hands as he was swearing in a new, state-appointed board member.

The Compton mayor resents the state's role in the school district so much that he campaigned against the last school bond issue. The bond issue failed, which means it will take longer to repair roofs and walls that leak so badly that teachers can't post student work on bulletin boards for fear the papers will get soaked.

Yet some community leaders seek common ground. Basil Kimbrew, a board member once so vigorously opposed to the takeover that he joined a lawsuit aimed at regaining control of the district, recently organized a rally to bring people together to improve the district. He says a board member training program, sponsored by the California School Boards Association, convinced him that the most important goal of a school board should be to improve student achievement.

"I wish we had our district back," he says. "But it doesn't matter who is in control as long as our kids are getting a quality education. Our bottom line is [student] failure is no longer an option."

How long should the state stay in Compton?

"I would venture to say it's easier to go into Compton than to leave Compton," says Tom Henry, chief administrative officer of the Fiscal Crisis and Management Assistance Team (FCMAT), an arm of the California Legislature that assists and evaluates struggling districts. "Compton was a long time in the making—15 to 20 years of neglect. It's taken a long time to get it where it is, and it will take a long time to get it back."

FCMAT is now conducting a curriculum audit of the Compton schools, examining test scores to determine whether teachers are covering the material that is tested on state exams. Henry's group will pinpoint weak areas and help school officials develop professional development programs to fill those gaps. FCMAT will conduct evaluations at six-month intervals to chart progress. "The intent is to return this district to local control," Henry says, "but I envision that occurring incrementally."

Henry says the state did a poor job of communicating with the community in its first few years in Compton. It did not tell parents and teachers how Compton students were doing—and how they *should* be doing. As a result, people were confused about what the state planned to accomplish.

Now, Henry thinks the state is on the right track. Even so, he says state officials have a difficult road ahead if the community doesn't work with them. "We know there are those who want to undermine the work of the state for the wrong reasons. We're going to try to educate people to counter that."

Jersey City: Surviving a decade of state control

Ten years. That's how long Jersey City has been under the shadow of the state. This year's graduates were in the third grade when the state took over the school system.

At last, the end might be in sight. "Clearly, they're close," says Peter Peretzman, a spokesman for the New Jersey Department of Education. "They've made really, really good progress."

Before the takeover, Peretzman says, Jersey City met only 35 percent of the monitoring indicators, involving such matters as financial management and facility improvements, that the state uses to track struggling districts. Now, he says, it is meeting 80 percent.

State officials say Jersey City—once considered a hotbed of patronage and corruption—is no longer plagued by chronic financial and management problems. For instance, new systems of accountability have cut down on the possibility that people would be paid by the school district for work they never performed.

With management running more efficiently, the state turned its attention to raising student achievement and upgrading facilities. The district developed special programs targeting low achievers and beefed up professional development for teachers. To enhance students' learning environments, school advocates convinced the community to support $156 million in building upgrades.

But are the students doing better?

The answer seems to be yes and no. Since 1994, for instance, the percentage of eighth-grade students scoring at or above state standards in reading has improved from 67 percent to 82 percent, and in math, from 52 percent to 75 percent. However, the percentage of eighth-graders meeting state standards on a writing test has declined from 75 percent to 69 percent.

"I am especially disappointed in the drop in the writing scores throughout the district," says Richard A. DiPatri, the state-appointed superintendent of the Jersey City schools. "Our goal is to turn the district back to local control, but we have to improve our high school test performance before that can happen." Only 57 percent of last year's juniors passed the reading and math portions of the state's high school proficiency test; 67 percent passed the writing section.

How long should it take to turn student achievement around? Isn't 10 years long enough?

Frank Belluscio, director of public information for the New Jersey School Boards Association (NJSBA), says the law recommends that the state stay in a district no longer than five years. But he says the law allows that timeline to be extended if the district fails to meet state standards.

"It comes down to the question of whether the state can do a better job than the people locally," Belluscio says. "That's the crux of the issue right now. At this point, the state has not shown that it has had a clear-cut impact on academics." Even so, NJSBA supports the takeover law, he says, because it is designed to help struggling districts—not just penalize them—and the law's ultimate goal is to return districts to local hands.

Some critics say the state waited too long before focusing on student achievement. In the beginning, the state's emphasis was more on money and management than on student achievement. The district has made progress, they say, but not enough.

"Test scores have improved, but improvement is such a relative term," says Gregg Butterfield, chairman of the Jersey City Board of Education. "There are 29 special-needs districts in New Jersey, and we were once ranked 28th. Now, we're in the top four. But there are 400 districts in the state. What that means is now we're the best of the worst."

But 10 years of state control is enough, he says: "Our community needs to start taking more responsibility for the kids. A state takeover does nothing to encourage that."

Hard lessons learned

The problems in some districts run so deep that it sometimes seems they will be struggling forever, no matter who is in charge. What works in these places, then, has a good chance of working anywhere. That's why communities with difficult-to-solve problems are excellent case studies for showing how to attack even the most troubling problems in public education. Here, then, are the lessons from Logan County, Compton, and Jersey City:

- Align the local curriculum with state standards and tests. In other words, train teachers to cover subject matter tested by the state. Failing to do this virtually guarantees stagnant test scores.
- Involve teachers from the outset. If the goal is to return the district to local control, you have to create a system that is running efficiently from the bottom up. You can begin by making sure teachers are certified in the subjects they're teaching. If they aren't, provide the training they need.
- Work to prevent turnover in key administrative positions, especially the superintendent's job. Constant change at the top is an impediment to reforms that take a few years to gather momentum.
- Pick a realistic number of problems to address each year. In Logan County, the magic number was eight to 10. Once you've fixed those problems, move on to a different set of problems.
- Open lines of communication with the community, which needs to know how students are doing and how much better you expect them to do. Set reachable and measurable goals and share progress updates with members of the public.
- Work to maintain consistency on the board. For the state, this means keeping the board intact in an advisory role following a takeover—rather than simply dissolving the board. Elected board members can serve as essential partners in a state's effort to improve a district.
- If you haven't already done so, seek formal board training, either from your state school boards association or your state education department. A feuding, bickering board is a very destructive force.

And when you see problems—whether in student achievement, financial matters, legal issues, or any of a thousand other things that can go wrong in a district—seek help. "Don't get defensive," says ECS's Johnson. "Be a part of the solution."

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Kevin Bushweller is a senior editor of The American School Board Journal.

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THE WASTAGE IN EDUCATION

There's a flabbiness in our thinking about schools that poses as high-mindedness

BY ROBERT J. SAMUELSON

THE UNITED STATES SPENDS MORE THAN A HALF-trillion dollars a year on education (to be precise: $530 billion in the 1995–96 school year, counting everything from elementary to graduate school). We waste a lot of that. The latest evidence comes from Massachusetts, where—for the first time—applicants for new teaching jobs are being tested for basic competence in reading, writing and a subject area. The first test was given in April to 1,795 recent or soon-to-be college graduates. The results were (to put it mildly) disappointing: 59 percent failed.

John Silber, chairman of the state Board of Education and chancellor of Boston University, expressed disgust at the scores. One question asked students to listen to a short passage and write what they had heard. "Scores of applicants," Silber wrote in The New York Times, recorded "new spellings like 'improbally,' 'corupt,' 'integraty,' 'bouth' (meaning both), 'bodyes' and 'relif'." Paul Reville, a former Board of Education member who saw some tests, says the "writing at the lowest end was absolutely abysmal."

What are we to make of this?

Well, one conclusion is that teaching continues to have a hard time attracting good students and that teachers' colleges—a source of many of the test candidates—are often mediocre. By this, I do not mean to stigmatize all teachers or overlook the special talent (different from raw intelligence) required to run a classroom. As it happens, my wife is a public-school elementary teacher. She's bright and works hard. I recognize the stiff demands of good teaching. Still, the Massachusetts test suggests that some of the nation's 3.1 million teachers belong elsewhere.

A second conclusion is that even a college degree has been devalued, because many students who get degrees "lack fundamental literacy skills," writes Jerome Murphy, dean of Harvard's School of Education, in The Boston Globe. Massachusetts released test results for candidates from 56 institutions. Only two (Harvard and Wellesley, with 13 candidates) had perfect pass records. Some well-known schools had fairly high failure rates: Brandeis, 47 percent; Boston University, 34 percent; the University of Massachusetts (Amherst), 45 percent; Simmons College, 60 percent.

But the largest lesson of this episode is that money can't buy educational success. Let's see why.

The main reason that college degrees have been cheapened is that, except at elite institutions, admissions standards barely exist. We've oversubsidized the expansion of higher education through federal student grants and loans and state university systems. The central problem of higher education is not too little money; it's too much. Too many colleges chase too few good students. To survive, colleges scramble to get bad students (and their tuitions). "If you have a high-school diploma and tuition—and can walk and talk—you can graduate from college," says Harvard's Murphy. "There are a lot of empty seats."

The glut of bad students means many need remedial courses—36 percent of freshmen in New York's university system, 48 percent in Kentucky's and 39 percent in Georgia's, reports a study for the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation. (The figures are for 1995.) Once in college, unqualified students further corrode academic standards. Faculty members are under pressure to lower course demands "to maintain [their] department's enrollment and claim on university resources," writes economist Robert Costrell of UMass.

What about teachers? Popular wisdom holds that we get the teachers we deserve; if we paid more, we'd get better teachers. Well, we've tried that on a modest scale. Between 1979 and 1989, average teachers' salaries (after inflation) rose 20 percent, report economists Michael Podgursky of the University of Missouri and Dale Ballou of UMass. Higher salaries were one response of states and localities to the critical 1983 report on schools, "A Nation at Risk." In a study, Podgursky and Ballou examined whether paying more meant better teachers. In general, it didn't.

Their explanation is that the ways teachers are hired and paid—reflecting custom and union contracts—offset most benefits of higher pay. Salary scales are typically uniform; teachers receive across-the-board increases. Teacher tenure, earned after a few years, makes it hard to fire incompetents. The result: higher pay caused the worst teachers to stay longer, because their other job prospects were poor. This reduced openings for better new teachers, who—with good skills—found other work.

Our education debates are leading nowhere. Most liberals superficially support tougher "standards" but still believe in throwing money at schools. This ensures waste and failure. Many conservatives have given up on public schools and plug "vouchers" or "choice." These schemes may help some students, but most will still use public schools. We've got to improve what we've got. In theory, that's easy; in practice, it may be impossible.

The essence of good schools is the combination of competent (and committed) teachers with motivated students. To attract better teachers, we need to dismantle much of the traditional—and union-protected—system of hiring and firing. Principals can't realistically be held accountable for what goes on in their schools if they can't fire incompetent teachers. School systems won't draw enough competent high-school chemistry teachers if they can't pay them more than elementary-school teachers. Similarly, many students won't be motivated to work harder if they know they've got a free pass to college. Admissions standards need to be toughened.

But such changes founder on enduring obstacles. Unions exist to protect teachers, not to help students. Most middle-class parents want their kids to go to college; tougher admissions standards would trigger a backlash. Most educators are cautious. I asked Harvard's Murphy whether he would endorse an idea of mine: require students who want a federal college loan or grant to pass a competency test to show they're qualified for college. He wouldn't. There's a flabbiness in our thinking about schools that poses as high-mindedness. The result is huge wastage that is ultimately measured in lost human potential.

The Public Perspective, August/September 1998

California Struggles to Repair Its Troubled Schools

By Richard Lee Colvin

News about public education in California, long lauded as one of the nation's most innovative systems, seemed to go from bad to worse in the mid-1990s. And this apparent slide made front-page headlines.

The state's fourth graders were tied for last—behind Mississippi—in reading on the National Assessment of Educational Progress. In math, the picture was about the same for fourth graders and only slightly better—32nd out of 40 states—among eighth graders. In science, eighth graders were more than a year behind the national average. If the national rankings were cause for concern, so were the state's own reckonings. Half of the students admitted to the California State University system—who, by definition, are among the top third of the state's graduates—required remedial help in math or English. Additionally, that number was rising as the 22-campus system toughened its entrance exams to bring them in line with the additional high school courses students were being expected to take.

> “*The single most powerful theme that emerged from a 20-page* Los Angeles Times *report on the state's educational system was that educators and, to some degree, parents are struggling against an undertow of concern and self-doubt that leads to waves of self-examination. Teachers in particular are weary of the tiring cycle of reform, followed by neglect, followed by a new reform, each of which is introduced with high hopes and little follow-through.*”

By mid-1997, the unrelentingly negative news had caught the eyes of editors at the *Los Angeles Times*. Were the schools in as bad shape as the parade of stories made it seem, they asked? If so, how did they get that way? And what were the chances they would get better? Answers to those questions were readily available but depended on whom you asked. And, since the state had thrown out its standardized testing system in 1990 and botched an attempt to revive it, there was little official data to support or gainsay those answers. Besides, no one seemed interested in analyzing the official data that did exist or holding anyone accountable for addressing the problems. Critics of public education seized on the bad news, mining it for causes. The embarrassingly bad reading performance was laid at the feet of "whole language" instruction, which in the late 1980s had shifted the emphasis away from skills and toward enjoyment of literature. The math debacle was blamed on "new-new math," the well-intentioned effort to lure more students into taking higher level courses. No one had thought that idea was bad; it simply turned out to be a difficult task without omitting some of what makes math hard and sometimes boring—the practice and the abstractions.

But public education's champions had their defense ready as well. California was just beginning to emerge from a devastating economic slump that had squeezed the schools' budgets. The state ranked near the bottom nationally in the per-pupil ratio of school librarians, library books, school psychologists, reading specialists, and counselors. Class sizes were the largest in the nation—30 or more on average. Plus, they said, the schools had absorbed an unprecedented influx of immigrants from Mexico and Central America, who presented challenges involving language and poverty. All things considered, educators said, they were doing a pretty decent job.

Political Bantering

Whatever the causes, the schools' troubles were increasingly in the spotlight. Republican Governor Pete Wilson earned the enmity of public education supporters—notably the powerful California Teachers Association—for his support of publicly funded vouchers for children to attend private schools. The CTA had bankrolled the overwhelming 1993 defeat of a ballot measure that would have done just that, and Wilson had responded by proposing to end automatic tenure of teachers and to make firing veteran teachers easier. Yet, in the 1994 gubernatorial campaign, Democrat Kathleen Brown all but ignored the issue believing it was less important to voters than crime and the economy. Many now say, in hindsight, that her strategy steered away from one of Wilson's biggest weaknesses. Handed a bye, he pulled out a victory.

By then, however, the economy was beginning to rebound. The massive job losses in aerospace and other defense industries that had been the downside of the end of the Cold War were abating. Hollywood, small business, the computing explosion, and exports were fueling an increasingly robust economy, and, by state law, most of the tax revenues those activities generated had to be ploughed into education. Wilson, not wanting to see the largesse wind up in teachers' paychecks, instead launched a multi-billion-dollar effort to reduce class sizes in the early grades to no more than 20 pupils. He attached that initiative to a comprehensive reading improvement plan that would pay for new books and extensive training, all aimed at reemphasizing the importance of phonics, grammar, spelling, and other skills. Math was to be targeted as well.

The class size reduction program, now set to begin its third year, is one of the most costly state-level education reform plans ever. It is also tremendously popular, causing politicians of every stripe to vow to expand it and make it permanent.

By 1998, education had become the voters' top concern. Polls conducted on behalf of the California Teachers Association were showing that worries about education had risen faster in the state than nationally. Meanwhile, crime and the economy were dropping down the list. A *Los Angeles Times* poll showed the same thing although not as dramatically. Between March 1994 and December 1997, the percentage of those surveyed identifying education as the state's most significant problem rose from 14% to 23%. Crime, on the other hand, was seen as the state's greatest problem by 49% in 1994 but only 37% identified it as such in 1997. Worries over the economy were fading as well, with those seeing it as the top issue falling from 49% in 1994 to 21% in 1997.

Not surprisingly, then, education was the central focus in the June 1998 Democratic primary, as Lieutenant Governor Gray Davis, Congresswoman Jane Harman, and wealthy businessman Al Checchi all tried to out-promise one another. Each vowed more money and textbooks, more demanding academic standards, more time in school, and policies to ensure that teachers are competent. The polling done for the CTA confirmed the political wisdom of focusing on education—voters were leaning toward any politician who focused on the topic almost regardless of the specifics of their proposals. Now that Davis has won the primary, education is surely to be the top issue in his general election battle with Attorney General Dan Lungren, a conservative Republican. Lungren, like his predecessor, supports publicly funded vouchers for students to attend private schools. Davis, endorsed by the teachers' unions, opposes vouchers.

The Cycle of Frustration

In the fall 1997, the *Times* launched a three-pronged independent examination of the quality of the state's 1,000 public school districts and 8,000 schools which serve 5.6 million students. In November and December, the *Times* poll in partnership with UCLA's Center for the Study of Evaluation, explored the perceptions and experiences of students, teachers, and parents statewide. Throughout the fall, *Times* reporters and computer specialists, with the help of education and statistical experts at UCLA's Center, analyzed dozens of databases on test scores, teacher qualifications, course-taking patterns, student backgrounds, and much more. Finally, reporters were sent to seven high schools around the state for a week to observe education's front lines. The schools were chosen to reflect the state's tremendous diversity economically, academically, and ethnically. For three days in May 1998, the *Times* published its findings in 20 full pages of stories, pictures, graphs, and charts which were assembled in three special, stand-alone sections. The single most powerful theme that emerged was that educators and, to some degree, parents are struggling against an undertow of concern and self-doubt that leads to waves of self-examination. Teachers in particular are weary of the tiring cycle of reform, followed by neglect, followed by a new reform, each of which is introduced with high hopes and little follow-through.

That cycle has led to a profound sense of frustration. Forty-six percent of the teachers surveyed said fewer than half of their students are reading at the appropriate grade level. Moreover, many teachers said they don't bother giving students homework because they don't think it will get done, and they don't have enough textbooks to send home or they don't think students will be able to understand the reading involved.

> ***"The class-size reduction program, now set to begin its third year, is one of the most costly state-level education reform plans ever. It is also tremendously popular, causing politicians of every stripe to vow to expand it and make it permanent."***

High school teachers, however, are not sure how to help students who are behind. "It isn't our job in high school to teach reading; it's to teach thought," said Camille Konigsberg, who chairs the English Department at Manual Arts High School in central Los Angeles. The impact of the reading difficulties is unmistakable. Valuable class time is taken up with reading aloud; science teachers write outlines of chapters on the blackboard and then have their students copy the material word for word as the teacher reads it. Math skills are lacking as well. A 10th grade algebra class in Manual Arts' College Preparatory Magnet program covers rationalizing fractions, arithmetic that should have been learned in elementary school. In a physical science class at Manual Arts, the teacher has to omit experiments that require math because most of the 11th graders have yet to pass algebra. Teachers tell the same tales whether they work at a well-funded, nearly all-white school in Bakersfield, at a school in Anaheim serving a transient population of low-income laborers, or at a school in San Diego near the Mexican border that is an entry point for immigrants.

Good Grades but Dismal Test Scores

Test scores released in July confirm the anecdotal and survey evidence included in the *Times'* series. Not surprisingly, the numbers are far worse for students not fluent in English. That confirmed a longstanding public perception that the state's heavy emphasis on instruction in a child's native language had doomed children to poor academic performance in English. In June, voters approved by a 61% to 39% margin a proposition that all but eliminates that method in California classrooms. Only about a third of the state's 9th, 10th and 11th graders were reading above the 50th percentile. Yet the seriousness of the situation is masked by other statistics: dropout rates, for example, appear to be down as they are nationally, and, compared to 10 or 15 years ago, California students of today are taking far more college preparatory courses, especially African-American students. But the additional course work does not appear to be paying off: SAT scores have remained stagnant overall and they have dropped among the best students, those who reported getting all A's in their courses. Meanwhile, the percentage of students requiring remedial courses at the California State University system and even the elite University of California system is growing.

Poverty, Mobility, and Language

A key reason for such performances by students seems to be poverty. The percentage of poor students has more than doubled to 28% during the past three decades, and California schools are unable to overcome the effect of deprivation. A UCLA analysis of a decade's worth of data found that poverty explained 44% of the difference between any two schools' performance on the SAT college entrance exam. The finding was so powerful it stunned the experts. Poverty is "not insurmountable," UCLA researcher Richard Brown said. "But it's certainly a steep climb to overcome it."

In addition, California's students are the most mobile in the country. About 75% of them change schools at least once before the 12th grade and a third change schools three or more times for reasons unrelated to normal promotion. The more a student moves, the lower his or her chance of graduating from high school, according to an analysis of the records of 13,000 students done by Russell Rumberger, an education professor at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Moreover, language difficulties compound the problems many students face: nearly one in four California students is classified as "limited English proficient," meaning they are not fluent.

Is Poverty Destiny? Not Among Asian-Americans

To be sure, poverty is not necessarily destiny, especially among the state's growing number of children of Asian descent. Asian students work harder than those of other ethnicities including white students. Proportionally, twice as many Asians as whites take the college preparatory courses required for admission to the University of California. In the areas of math and science, the differences are even more stark, with Asian-American students three times as likely as whites to take advanced courses.

> **“ *Clearly, factors beyond the control of schools—students' poverty and motivation—have a profound impact on academic outcomes. Given all of the issues, it's not surprising that 71% of Californians polled thought the quality of public education in the state was fair or poor. Among African-American parents, that figure was a stunning 83%.* ”**

A *Times* computer-data analysis found that students in Latino- and Asian-majority schools were quite similar in two key ways. In both types of schools, 24% to 30% of students spoke limited English and about 20% were from families on welfare. Yet, 45% of the seniors in the majority Asian schools completed the University of California's required regimen of college-preparatory courses compared to 30% of the seniors in the mostly Latino schools.

Research by the College Board, the New York-based organization that sponsors the SAT, also showed marked disparities in performance. Similar percentages of Asian and Latino test-takers last year spoke a language other than English at home, for example, and proportionally more whites than Asians came from families earning more than $40,000 annually. Asians, however, had the highest grade-point averages. Clearly, factors beyond the control of schools—students' poverty and motivation—have a profound impact on academic outcomes.

Given all of the issues, it's not surprising that 71% of Californians polled thought the quality of public education in the state was fair or poor (see Figure 1). Among African-American parents, that figure was a stunning 83%. About half of those surveyed said their local school was only fair or poor, and that number rose to 70% among African-American parents. On curriculum issues, Californians say too many kids are simply passed from grade to grade without learning necessary skills. That perception was confirmed by the poll of teachers, 42% said they simply cannot hold a student back and 32% said it would be difficult to do so.

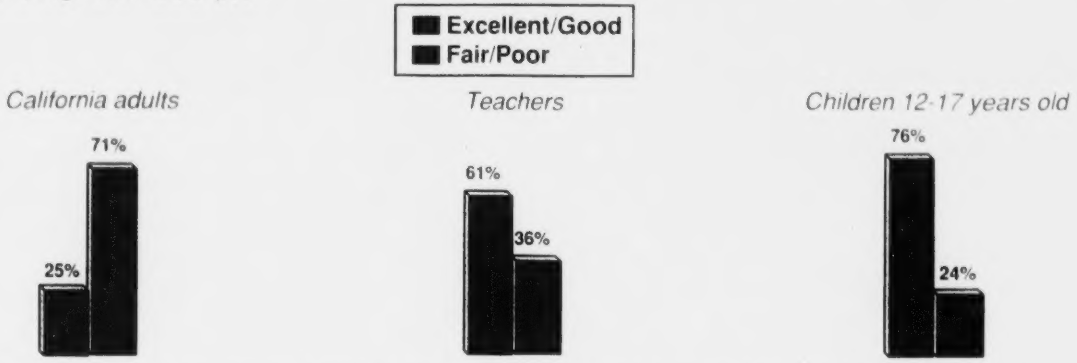
Lack of Money Takes Its Toll

The biggest problem the schools face, according to the poll, is a lack of funding. One in five respondents cited budget cuts as the most significant issue. The second biggest concern was large class sizes, and was cited by 17% of those surveyed. In 1965, California's per-pupil spending was fifth-highest in the nation. That figure was the statewide average, of course, meaning that many districts spent far less and many spent far more. By 1995, the state's per-pupil spending had fallen to 41st in the nation. Now, it is on the rise but the California still ranks only 37th, spending about $900 below the national average.

Meanwhile, in the past three decades, the state absorbed a huge number

Figure 1: School Ratings Differ Among the General Public, Teachers, and Students

Question: How would you rate the overall quality of education in public schools in California today? Would you rate it excellent, or good, or fair, or poor?



Note: Children 12-17 years old were asked, "How would you rate the quality of education you have received in school: would you say it is excellent, or good, or fair, or poor?" See pages 24-27 for more data from this survey.

Source: Survey by *Los Angeles Times*, November-December 1997.

of immigrants, saw the poverty rate more than double, and watched as many of its buildings fell into disrepair. What does that lack of money mean? For one thing, it means that fewer kids attend summer school. In the 1970s, the Los Angeles Unified School District enrolled 300,000 students in summer school. This year, fewer than 70,000 will be signed up.

Less money also means that buses for field trips are a rarity paid for by the PTA in most districts. Music and art teachers are so scarce that in most districts they travel from school to school. Fees for extra curricular activities are routine. Many students do not go out for sports because they cannot afford the fees for uniforms and transportation. A lack of textbooks is also a serious problem. The poll of students in middle- and high school found that a quarter had to share textbooks and 42% said their textbooks were seriously out of date. In a telling glimpse of what goes on inside schools, 48% said they did not use the restrooms at their school because they were filthy, out-of-order, or ill-supplied.

A Shortage of Teachers

But money alone will not be enough to fix the problems; the state also has a serious and growing shortage of qualified teachers. Only two-thirds of the teachers in the 680,000-student Los Angeles school district are permanent, fully-credentialed teachers. Statewide, more than 31,000 classrooms are presided over by such teachers. On any particular day, 2,000 of those classrooms are staffed by "long-term substitutes" who have little or no experience but are allowed to work a month in one assignment before moving on. Those teachers are not even required to pass a test showing they possess skills expected of most 10th graders.

The teacher shortage looms large as the state continues to invest in having no more than 20 students per teacher in kindergarten through grade three. The class-size reduction program, in fact, exacerbated the problem because it required one new teacher for every two classrooms in which the number of students was lowered.

The shortage of trained teachers also threatens the success of another set of reforms that is in the formative stage. The state Board of Education is adopting "standards" in reading, math, social studies, and science. The reading and math documents, the only ones finalized, represent a dramatically more ambitious set of expectations for all but the most academically rigorous schools. In math, for example, all students will be expected to take the equivalent of two years of algebra and one year of geometry. Already, however, an estimated 46% of the state's high school math classes now are taught by teachers who neither majored nor minored in the subject.

California's education establishment has a long history of innovating to improve education, and evidence of the various initiatives can be seen in schools across the state. But the good intentions rarely lead to sustained effort, close monitoring, and insistence on results. In a state where the needs of the students are so dramatic, such shortsightedness and lack of attention has produced an educational system that, on the whole, is inadequate for the economic needs of the state. To be sure, there are many good schools but there are far more where too many students are being graduated without the skills to survive either in college or on the job.

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Creating Reforms That Can Work

5

In many big cities, noneducators are being asked to create rescue strategies for the public schools. In Cleveland and Chicago, mayors have taken control of the school system and are searching for ways to transform failed schools and raise student achievement across the board. In the District of Columbia, as in Baltimore, lay reform boards have been asked both to navigate a school system through its day-to-day crises and to create a new strategy that will substantially increase performance.

These assignments to noneducators arise out of desperation. In these cities and many more, successive school boards and superintendents have been unable to unite educators on an improvement strategy. In part the problems of uniting for action are political, as discussed above. But some of the barriers to united action are intellectual. People do not know how to start, and much of the available expert advice comes in the form of a sales pitch (buy my silver-bullet teaching materials or my new teacher-training program, and it will set off changes that will make all children succeed) or a double-bind admonition (you must rescue the children, but you must avoid any changes in teachers' and administrators' assignments or working conditions).

Today's mayors, civic and foundation leaders, and school boards must therefore construct new solutions. Like new management teams taking over troubled businesses, they need to avoid being drawn into every issue that concerns people inside the system. They need to devise change strategies that are sophisticated enough to improve the performance of a very complex organization, yet are simple enough to integrate the efforts of many people. Distilling what has been learned from our own study—including case studies of local reform efforts and city reform simulation exercises,[1] plus others' studies of partially successful efforts to reform big-city school systems[2]—we offer suggestions to help those newly responsible for reforming city school systems.

How to Get Started

City leaders faced with a new responsibility can easily feel flooded with demands and unable to find a place to start. However, there are ways to make the problems manageable.

Separate Immediate Management from Long-Term Planning

The cycle of urban school reform is characterized by long periods of stagnation punctuated by terrible emergencies. This is particularly true when school system problems become so severe that the mayor or the state government is forced to disband the school board and create a whole new management structure, as has recently happened in Cleveland, Chicago, Washington, D.C., Baltimore, and Trenton and Paterson, New Jersey, and is sure to happen elsewhere.

The emergency can become especially severe if a group of community leaders is forced both to deal with the school system's daily crises and to create a reform that can make a difference in the long run. In such situations, short-term disasters readily drive out long-term thinking. The lay board in Baltimore, for example, was forced to divide into a number of committees with executive powers. Board members spent so much time on immediate issues such as personnel, bus routes, building main-

Hill, Paul T. and Celio, Mary Beth, *Fixing Urban Schools*, Brookings Institution Press, Washington D.C., 1998, pp. 61-84.

tenance, and complaints about misuse of funds that they had little opportunity to talk together, take advice, or formulate long-term options for discussion. The District of Columbia lay board faced similarly grave emergencies (in particular a court order that prevented schools from opening in 1997 until all roof, furnace, and plumbing repairs were complete). These issues fell even more strongly on them when the specially appointed chief executive, retired U.S. Army general Julius Becton, resigned under fire about financial and property management. The Chicago reform board was able to rely on a strong chief executive operating under the mayor's personal authority. Of all the emergency boards appointed to rescue city school systems, only Chicago's was able to concentrate on long-term issues.

In general, short-term crises drive out long-term thinking. City school districts are generally in desperate straits financially, managerially, and educationally. Questions of student safety, labor unrest, and charges of criminal misuse of public funds grab attention, and work on creating a new school system that could educate children more effectively can get neglected. Unions often demand assurances that no workers will be reassigned and no jobs will be lost before leaders can fully understand the consequences of such commitments. School boards and civic leaders should segment their work to ensure that at least some members are free to work on the district's long-term school performance problems. An executive committee should handle day-to-day matters without making long-term commitments, so other members can think ahead, as discussed below.

Even as school board members and civic leaders focus on specifically educational issues, they should separate short- and long-term issues. Educationally, the short-term issue is almost always one of student reading proficiency. Elementary-level students, especially low-income minority children, fall rapidly behind national averages, and shockingly low numbers of secondary school students are competent readers.

School boards and civic leaders can address students' direst reading problems even as they are considering more fundamental structural reforms in the public education system. As participants in the decision-making simulations used by the Brookings study have suggested, reading scores can be raised on an emergency basis by creating special triage programs for children whose reading scores are near enough to meeting state standards so that a period of accelerated work might put them over the top. This triage arrangement would temporarily assign every certified teacher who was not assigned to regular classroom duty (including the many certified teachers who normally work in the central office) to teach reading in schools where large numbers of students had scores only slightly below state reading standards. This is certainly not a long-term solution, but it could lead to prompt increases in the numbers of students who meet state standards and establish the principle that focused effort improves performance.

Alternatively, a district could temporarily mandate that every student and every teacher in every school spend half of every school day on reading instruction. Drafting every teacher in the district for this purpose would allow schools to create small homogeneous classes for intense instruction.

Such expedients are not permanent reforms, but they could make a big enough dent in performance deficits to forestall state takeovers or collapses in public confidence. They could also set the stage for broader and more lasting reforms by showing that strikingly different uses of person-power and instructional time are possible and can produce results.

Look for the Roots of the Problem

When a school system fails students and continues failing despite changes of leadership and many successive reform efforts, there is no escaping the conclusion that the problem is built into the system itself. There is always a temptation to settle for a quick-acting, single-factor solution—for example, a new after-school tutoring program, enough new teachers to lower class size by a few percentage points, new attitude adjustment sessions for teachers—that can avoid the pain of a thorough rethinking of the way the school system does business. However, when a city school system's performance has fallen to the point where it is threatened by state or judicial takeover, or where parents who can escape the schools are doing so, showy short-term solutions are not enough. Board members have to start asking how they can reengineer the school system so that failure is not endemic.

City public school systems are now government agencies run by civil servants and operating under rules made by political decisionmaking bodies. School boards make policies in response to political pressures. Even when the pressures abate, the rules remain, teaching staffs are held in place by collective bargaining agreements, and staff members in the central office supervise schools from specialized perspectives (such as compliance with federal program requirements and observance of the provisions in teacher contracts). The result is that every school becomes host to many programs and requirements, each focused on a particular problem or beneficiary. These separate efforts compete for the time and attention of teachers, administrators, and students, and they often end up getting in one another's way.

The current system is built to make schools responsive to mandates and political bargains, past and present, made by the state legislature or the local school boards. And the system works: schools attend to these matters. Teachers and principals accept the constraints imposed by such mandates and try to work within them. However, compliance does not equal effectiveness. Schools that are dominated by mandates and compliance issues are seldom as attentive to quality of instruction and student learning as they need to be. Effective schools—especially those most successful with disadvantaged students—are not preoccupied with rules or adult job protections. They are united by a vision of what students need to learn and how adults must work together on instruction.

If the work of a reform board is to have lasting results, the board must start at the beginning, asking what kinds of schools we want for our children, what prevents our having them now, and how we can build a system that will support, not prevent, such schools. Subsequent sections suggest how that can be done.

Where to Get Help

Local leaders do not need to go it alone. They can ask for help from sources that will not try to co-opt or dominate their decisions.

Rely on an Outside Institution as a Critical Friend

School boards and groups of civic leaders ultimately need to make their own plans and solve their local problems, but they can be greatly strengthened by an outside critical friend. An outside organization that can work with the local board in confidence, answering questions, gathering data, and reflecting on the experience of other cities, can be indispensable.

Such a critical friend can follow events in the city but can stand above the local fray and refocus or introduce important ideas that have gotten lost. It can also help remind local leaders that short-term crises must not blur their focus on long-term strategy making and restructuring and can help create local capacity to monitor successes and failures.[3] There are sources of such help. Some localities have joined national networks with others struggling to reform. The National Alliance for Restructuring, part of the National Center for Education and the Economy in Washington, D.C., provides this form of help for communities that want to use standards as the driver of reform. The New American Schools (NAS) Corporation also provides consultants and advisors for school districts interested in adopting NAS-sponsored new school designs. RAND has provided broad assistance to community-wide strategic planning in Pittsburgh and Cleveland. The Education Commission of the States (ECS), an interstate compact dedicated to disseminating promising practices nationwide, has provided this form of assistance in a number of localities. In the future, Brookings will use the lessons from this project in teaming with ECS to provide critical friend assistance.

All these organizations require at least partial payment for their services, and the best funding sources are local foundations and businesses. Few struggling school systems have the available money for these purposes; private funding also ensures that the critical friend organization will not be crippled by political constraints.

Assemble Diverse Groups of Experts to Get beyond Local Politics

School board members and other local leaders put in charge of school reform face a welter of pressures and demands. Vendors urge investments in instructional technology. Central office staff members and university professors propose adoption of new curricula and grade-level reorganization. Taxpayer groups demand better fiscal accounting and improved personnel systems. Teachers' unions and other employee groups seek assurance that no jobs will be lost. Parents who have worked out special placements for their children demand that "good programs" be left alone. "Friends of public education" groups urge pressure on the state for more money as a prerequisite for change.

Many of these ideas may be good and necessary. But school boards and civic leadership groups that try to accommodate all these demands quickly find themselves doing a little of everything without a definite strategy for turning the school system around. There is a difference between a strategy—a set of coordinated actions designed to complement one another in resolving a complex problem—and a series of unrelated actions taken one by one in response to the pressures of the moment. Local leaders who follow the series-of-unrelated-actions approach will recreate the problems they were appointed to correct. Though public education is often condemned for its resistance to change, it does not reject new ideas. On the contrary, big-city school systems often encompass almost every imaginable approach to instruction and reform. Many good ideas often operate at small scale, usually in isolation and sometimes in competition with one another.

Local leaders need expert help getting beyond abstract options so they can move toward devising sets of complementary actions with clear implementation plans, assignments of administrative responsibility, funding schemes, performance indicators and timetables, and midcourse assessment plans.

School reform experts—the very people whose differences of opinion and feuds have been described in earlier chapters—are indispensable sources of ideas and strategies. However, local school boards and groups of civic leaders should not deal with such experts one by one. They should consult with experts in groups, using their critical friend organization to challenge experts who advance specific points of view to acknowledge the limitations of their own ideas and craft plans that incorporate the strengths of competing ideas.[4]

One important function of a critical friend organization is to assemble a group of education reform experts who represent competing schools of thought. As we have found in the course of the Brookings study's simulation exercises, expert groups that include economists, political scientists, and people knowledgeable about private education, as well as educators and experts in testing and teacher professional development, provide much broader and more logically complete reform advice than do more narrowly composed groups.

There are many advantages of dealing with such experts in teams, not the least of which is that debate (and the critical friend organization) can keep individuals honest and prevent local leaders from being swayed in different directions as individual experts barnstorm through town.

Businesses and foundations also need to make sure they do not fractionate local leaders' strategies by offering funding for one-sided or magic-bullet solutions. Funders are as susceptible as anyone else to being seized by enthusiasm for plausible but incomplete initiatives; they need to support the effort to create a balanced and logically complete strategy. This can be accomplished if local private funders pay the expenses of the critical friend organization and the diverse panel of experts discussed above and pledge to support the whole reform strategy that emerges.

Relying on carefully balanced groups of experts also helps construct definite options that can become the object of local public discussion. Plans assembled by experts are likely to be bolder and better organized than reform plans that bubble up from unstructured local political processes. They are also more likely than politically generated plans to withstand criticism. Skilled leaders can force people with objections to explain how the plan can be changed without destroying its overall effectiveness.

Seek Help from the State

By the time local elected and community leaders have been placed in charge of a city school system, it is likely that the state department of education will have tried everything it can think of to help the city. That does not mean, however, that state officials cannot help. They can relieve a city of many burdensome rules that would otherwise strictly limit local reform strategies. State officials also have strong incentives to help, since big cities that have been taken over by lay leaders are often seen as major liabilities for the whole state.

City school systems receive funds from many state sources and from federal programs managed by the state department of education. Such programs often have stringent rules about how funds can be used. Reformers often find that city school systems have a great deal of money but are forced to spend it inefficiently.[5] City school systems are often unable to convert funds earmarked for transportation to other uses, such as teacher hiring. They often have a substantial amount of money for teacher training, but it is divided into so many small tightly controlled accounts that no comprehensive teacher training strategy is possible. Federal and state funds for remedial education of disadvantaged students are also held in separate accounts and dedicated to specific teachers and the services they provide. Taken together, program regulations and spending controls can create gridlock.

State governments are, however, able to make remarkably flexible arrangements for leaders of troubled school systems who can say what they need and why. State leaders in Ohio, for example, have found ways to grant almost any waiver requested by reform leaders in Cleveland and Cincinnati. Many states can also make greater use of flexibility provisions of the recently amended elementary and secondary education act (ESEA). The largest ESEA program, Title 1, now allows almost any low-income inner-city school to use its funds for schoolwide improvement efforts.

Some federal regulations are harder to waive, especially those connected with civil rights and services to the disabled. However, local administrators' interpretations of those rules are often more restrictive than necessary. Chicago found, for example, that the U.S. Justice Department had a far more flexible view of how charter schools could serve disabled children than did the city's own civil rights unit.

In general, local leaders should not accept the first thing they hear about what is permissible and what cannot be done. They should seek advice and cooperation from high-level state and federal officials, including their governor and the U.S. secretary of education.

How to Construct a Reform Package Bold Enough to Work

Problems as deeply ingrained as those of urban public education cannot be solved by timid measures. There are ways that local leaders can

avoid having their options constrained by the preferences and interests of people within the system.

Avoid a Stakeholder Strategy

Community leaders are inevitably tempted to assemble the heads of organizations that run public education—the teacher's union, principals, central office personnel, custodians, and the PTA—to hammer out a new reform strategy. This approach has the advantage of showing respect for the people who work in public education day to day. It has the disadvantage of returning the initiative to the very people who have found ways of living comfortably with the status quo. Stakeholder groups have accommodated themselves to the barriers that prevent school improvement. Some have members who believe any change will hurt them. Even parent groups can be captured by families that have gained the best public school placements for their children. Most of them sincerely want schools to improve, but they know and believe all the reasons why no serious initiative is feasible.

Community leaders need to be realistic about the jobs and career commitments of superintendents, central office administrators, teachers' union heads, and principals. With the rare exception of a superintendent recruited from businesss or the military, all have made careers within the existing public education structure and have reason to be loyal to people like themselves. Some leading individuals from these groups—including, in many cities, the leader of the teachers' union—may see the need for the change and even be able to take personal risks to promote it. But the need to protect the jobs, incomes, satisfaction, and benefits of their constituents inevitably limits the changes that union leaders and other stakeholder representatives can propose or openly support.[6]

Stakeholders have legitimate roles, but they should be consulted after community leaders have made their own assessment of the situation and identified, usually with outside help, some potential reform strategies. Reform leaders must also manage their relationships with stakeholders to maximize freedom of action. In their own professional roles, many civic leaders run churches, companies, foundations, charitable institutions, and colleges and universities. They know how to listen to the stakeholders in the organizations they lead without giving anyone a veto over a necessary line of action. Leaders need to use these same skills in their efforts to reform public education. As in every other field, leadership takes time and attention, and it involves more than finding the golden mean among all organized groups.

Redesign the System around Strong Schools

Effective schools are alike in some ways and different in others. All are simple, focused on student learning, collaborative, personalized, responsive, willing to face and overcome their own weaknesses, and open to parents. Effective schools differ in the instructional methods and materials they choose, how they select and train their teachers, and how they help students who are struggling to learn.

Unfortunately, leaders responsible for education reform often confuse the aspects of effective schools that should vary from school to school with those that should be the same. Thus school boards and other civic leadership groups often struggle with questions like what texts and instructional methods all schools should choose, how all teachers should be retrained, and by what formal processes struggling students should get help.

A reform plan must start with the commitment to create a system of public governance and oversight that fosters strong, distinctive schools. Unfortunately, if these issues are settled by citywide deliberation and mandated for all schools, maintaining necessary differences among schools becomes impossible. Teachers and principals cannot make the choices necessary to take advantage of the specific strengths of their students and teachers. Lack of freedom drives out initiative and responsibility and fosters concern for compliance—thus recreating the weaknesses of the education system that reform was supposed to remedy.

Leaders responsible for creating a reform strategy need to make sure schools have the freedom and opportunity to develop integrative capital, as defined in chapter 2. Coherent, productive schools arise from the interaction of ideas about instruction and from hard, collaborative work among teachers. The adults in a school must work together to decide many things: how to put basic ideas into practice; how to judge whether students are progressing satisfactorily; how to adapt the instructional program when students are not learning all they should or when society demands that students learn new things; when to collaborate and when to work independently; when to compromise and when to allow dissidents to split off. The authors' new research on schools high in integrative capital demonstrates:

—The centrality of ideas. Coherent schools are not slavishly devoted to cloning other schools, but all use some existing conception of how a school might operate as a starting point for their own development. Some are based on the writings of theorists like Montessori or consciously imitate successful schools. Some rely on frequent contact with living educational theorists or organizations, like Robert Slavin's Success for All or the New American Schools design teams.

—The importance of collaboration. Coherent, productive schools leave nothing to chance. School leaders understand the importance of teacher collaboration and problem solving, and they engage teachers in decisions that matter to them. Leaders also directly manage staff hiring and socialization as processes that can profoundly affect school climate and performance.

—Neither ideas nor process is sufficient. Unless guided by ideas about instruction, no process is likely to create a coherent, productive school. Schools that try to increase productivity via group process without strong guiding principles have been unable to create the degree of staff cooperation required for productive work. Similarly, good ideas without a strategy for implementation change nothing.

Several steps are essential in developing a school high in integrative capital:

—Start with one or a few individuals with ideas about how a school can work and what students should know. This can be done by offering outstanding local teachers and principals the opportunity to describe the kind of school they would create, by issuing a request for proposals that allows anyone with an idea to propose a school plan (this has been done with some success in Chicago and in Dade County, Florida), or by hiring an organization that is in business to run schools, including some of the New American Schools design teams and for-profit firms like Advantage, Edison, Sabis, and Alternative Public Schools.

—Make the ideas behind each individual school as explicit and public as possible so that teachers and parents who consider the school can understand what is offered and expected.

—Expect that schools will be different from one another, both because groups of children are not all alike and because there are many approaches to education that can work as long as they are put into practice by people who believe in them and have the freedom to implement the approach rigorously.

—Support the development of a tradition of strong and authoritative leadership in the new schools by supporting action consistent with the school plan and avoiding mandates that compromise or divert resources from the school plan.

—Encourage individual schools to build strong external constituencies of three kinds: customers (families who trust the school and rely on it to educate their children); external supporters (donors and intellectual mentors who buttress the school financially and educationally); and validators (employers and higher-level schools to which students aspire and that can provide feedback on the school's performance).

—Ensure that school leaders have control of funds and key decisions about hiring and curriculum and encourage leaders in individual schools to take the initiative with parents and the public, asserting what the school hopes to attain, where it is now failing, and what it will do next.

None of these steps is easy. Starting a school from scratch is difficult, but turning around a school with a tradition of low expectations and lax work habits is even harder. Reflecting these difficulties, most private and independent schools start with a model or exemplar in mind—an educational philosopher whose ideas they intend to put into practice or a school elsewhere that they hope to imitate. They do not require staff to invent everything for themselves or to meld warring factions into a coherent organization. Many coherent schools are started by people who have worked in exemplar schools and want either to provide a similar school to a new community or to improve on what they regard as an essentially sound model. Some are formed by groups hived off from existing schools; founders self-consciously build their school around a core staff of people who share commitments and past experiences.

Imitating successful schools is surely an underused method for creating strong schools and transforming weak ones. But there is also a place for new designs that show how a school's pedagogy, staffing, student life, and client relationships can be integrated. There is also a place for people and organizations who can help many schools develop the forms of integrative capital that school leaders, staff, or communities choose. The New American Schools Corporation has supported a few exemplary designs,[7] but their design teams are able to support only a few schools.[8] Congress has recently enacted the Porter-Obey bill, which will support creation and validation of some additional designs.

Restructure Schools' Incentives, Capabilities, and Opportunities

No one can say in the abstract exactly what overall reform strategy a locality should create for itself or guarantee that any one combination of initiatives will work in all settings. But we can say that every systemwide reform strategy must create incentives for school performance, ways of increasing school capabilities, and opportunities and freedom for school staff members to change the ways they serve students.[9]

These three elements of the reform of a whole big-city system work together. The incentives side of reform is the most familiar and the most obvious. For ten years, school improvement efforts have recognized that performance pressures in public education are too weak. In some areas, schools can fail students for generations without being closed or fundamentally changed. It is also possible for teachers and principals, protected by civil service status, to continue working for a long time without doing a good job. Reform is not supposed to expose teachers and schools to unnecessary or unsympathetic criticism, but it must make it clear that performance matters. It does so simply by emphasizing children's learning, rewarding schools and individuals that make a positive difference, and removing children from situations where they are not learning. No reform is possible if adults are secure in their jobs whether or not they or their schools perform for children.

A reform strategy must increase school capabilities by investing in new ideas, new methods of instruction, teacher training, and recruitment of new teachers if current ones cannot improve. Schools might improve to some degree on their own, but the dramatic increases needed in student learning require expertise that many struggling inner-city schools now lack. Schools need help devising improvement plans and assessing their own progress. Many current teachers need to refresh their subject matter knowledge, and some need to upgrade their basic skills. Schools need to be able to fill teacher vacancies with the best available people, not just those who are on the top of the civil service transfer list. New methods, books, computerized databases, advice, and training will not all appear spontaneously. They will have to be created by state, local, and private investment, and they will have to be made available to schools that have the incentives to use them.

The opportunity dimension of a reform strategy is equally important but less well recognized. School-level initiative is the engine of reform. The changes that matter will happen at the school level, and the only test of a reform is whether it leads to better instruction and increased student learning. Too often, however, teachers and principals feel that they are caught in a web of rules, job protections, and spending constraints that does not allow them to innovate, experiment, or quickly abandon an initiative that is not producing results. Schools need opportunities. They need to be relieved of rules that limit and routinize instruction, and they need to be free to use staff and money in creative ways. Some think schools will ultimately need more money, and they might. But the first thing they need is the opportunity to make full use of the money and talents they now have.

Use the Different Reform Theories as Building Blocks

Civic leadership groups and school boards do not have to invent reform strategies from scratch. The different theories of reform discussed above are excellent building blocks for a broad city school improvement strategy.

Table 5-1 summarizes the strengths and weaknesses of the different philosophies, how well they provide incentives, capabilities, and opportunity. Clearly, no one philosophy is strong in all ways, and a school board or other community leadership group that tried to pursue one to the

Table 5-1. *No One Philosophy Does Everything Necessary to Encourage a System of Strong Schools*

	School performance incentives	*Increasing school capabilities*	*Opportunity for schools to improve*
Teacher development	Weak: depends on individual motivation	Strong: focuses on teacher knowledge and skills	Weak: does not increase time for teacher learning or freedom of action
Standards	Weak: establishes goals, not consequences	Moderate: focuses attention on school performance weaknesses	Weak: does not increase time for improvement or freedom of action
School Designs	Weak: design use depends on individual motivation, group consensus	Strong: designs promote schoolwide strategy for child and adult learning	Moderate: designs guide efficient use of time, money
Decentralization	Mixed: seldom clarifies expectations and consequences for school performance	Moderate: seldom gives schools control of money to invest in training, materials	Moderate: exhorts schools to take initiative but does not establish freedom of action
Charters	Mixed: creates strong performance incentives for charter holders, not for others	Moderate: charter defines school mission and approach but does not give detailed guidance	Mixed: creates great freedom of action for charter holders, not for others
Contracts	Strong: creates powerful performance incentives for all schools	Moderate: contract defines school mission and approach but does not give detailed guidance	Strong: creates great freedom of action for all schools
Vouchers	Strong: creates powerful performance incentives for all schools	Weak: does not guide school improvement efforts	Strong: creates great freedom of action for all schools

exclusion of all others would probably fail to produce the degree of school improvement it sought.

A citywide reform strategy designed to capitalize on the complementary strengths of the different reform strategies could be more effective than any big-city reform that has been tried to date. Leaders should consider ways of mixing and matching reform philosophies—not in the spirit of allowing everyone in the school district to do his or her own thing, but in an effort to create a coordinated districtwide reform strategy. Table 5-2 suggests several coordinated strategies that emphasize the strengths of the different philosophies. Leaders should consider these and other mixed strategies that combine a philosophy that creates strong performance incentives with one or more others that provide school-level flexibility and efforts to increase school capabilities.

All combined strategies are not equal. In table 5-2, strategy 1 is probably easiest to implement because it most closely resembles the current system. However, it requires degrees of school control of dollars and staff selection that no public school system now allows.[10] Its reliance on centrally selected curricula and materials also limits schools' freedom of action and accountability for results. Strategy 2 creates performance incentives, but it also relies on centrally controlled assistance to schools. It too leaves the regulatory structure of public education intact, relying on waivers (which many teachers and principals have come to distrust as ambiguous and unreliable) to create opportunities for school change. Strategy 3 is a thorough departure from current practice, combining fundamental deregulation, diverse school providers, performance accountability, parental choice, and multiple sources of assistance to schools.[11]

These are not the only ways of creating combined reform strategies, and leaders in every community will face their own combinations of needs, political constraints, and opportunities. But any possible combined strategy should be assessed on the basis of how well it promotes school incentives, opportunities, and capabilities.

Get beyond the Politics of Hope

In many of our largest and most troubled cities (New York, Los Angeles, Cleveland, Washington, D.C.), every one of the reform ideas we have

discussed is operating in some form—present in some schools but not others or engaging some teachers within a single school while others pursue a contrary course. Because they operate separately, the potential complementarities of different reform initiatives are lost and their conflicts are maximized.

Cause-and-effect thinking—drawing all the links between a proposed initiative and the ultimate goal of improving student learning—can eliminate muddle and overcome destructive rivalries. It does so by establishing a higher standard for reform proposals, as explained in chapter 2. The current, lower standard is plausibility: is there some logical connection between a reform proposal (for example, investment in a new curriculum or testing system) and student achievement? The plausibility standard does not require proponents to identify the proposal's limitations or the ways in which other factors might nullify its effects.

Local civic leaders need to insist that reforms be thought through as carefully as business plans. People who run large organizations and businesses must not, as some educators observe, check their brains at the door when they get involved with public schools. Civic leaders must also discipline school superintendents and other government officials, who can otherwise survive by playing the politics of hope, or who can build support for themselves by professing that all children can learn, yet do nothing to make it happen. The core of the politics of hope is the constant creation of glittering new proposals, each of which generates excitement and sympathy for a period of months or years, until it is demonstrably not having any effect, at which time a new proposal is required. School superintendents who operate this way accomplish less, but sometimes keep their jobs longer, than those who pursue definite and consistent reform strategies.

How to Make Sure Plans Will Make a Difference

No strategy can be perfect the first time. Local leaders need to try promising approaches, observe the results, and make adjustments.

Pursue Multiple Approaches

The results of the community simulations used by the Brookings study team demonstrate that local leaders need not search for just one district-

Table 5-2. *Some Possible Combined Strategies and How They Provide Incentives, Capabilities, and Opportunities*

Strategies	*Incentives*	*Capabilities*	*Opportunities*
Strategy 1: Decentralization within the system, using standards, contracting and whole-school designs	School-specific performance agreements with superintendent or school board, specifying which schoolwide design the school will follow and how it will meet state standards; expectation that schools will follow distinctive approaches to instruction	District investment in new curriculum, materials, and technology; creation of new teacher training system responsive to individual school needs	School control over high proportion of funds, school hiring of staff, school specification of staff development needs
Strategy 2: A highly centralized system, using standards and major teacher development investments	Close performance-based supervision of school principals by superintendent; expectation that all schools use district-sanctioned standard methods and be assessed via state standards	District investment in new curriculum, materials, and technology; central office provides extensive teacher training opportunities	Schools free to request specific waivers to allow tailoring of standard methods to student needs
Strategy 3: A system with diverse providers, using whole-school designs, charters, contracting, standards, and vouchers	Every public school has a distinctive contract or charter that specifies the school's design or approach to instruction; parents can choose schools; new schools can be chartered to replace failing schools; and lowest-achieving students can get vouchers to attend private schools	District promotes formation of many independent non-profit providers of curricular advice, instructional materials, and teacher training; schools purchase their own advisers and providers of assistance	Schools control all funds, hire staff, and purchase assistance; are accountable only to provide services promised and show students' results; a central office has only two functions: supporting the board in making agreements with individual schools and assessing school performance in terms set by these agreements

wide solution. No one knows enough at any one time to prescribe a solution that will work for all schools or for an indefinite period. As earlier reform efforts have demonstrated, reform initiatives that transform some schools might leave others untouched. Chicago, for example, in 1989 decentralized control over school funds to elected local site councils. This reform led to dramatic changes in approximately one-third of elementary schools but did not touch any high school.[12] Subsequently, Chicago diversified its reform effort to create entirely different sets of incentives and capabilities increases for high schools and to deal differently with schools that improved under local site council control and those that did not. Chicago also created a strong citywide school performance accountability system and vested the power to close and replace failed schools in its superintendent.

Some of the most imaginative reform strategies include trying several promising approaches in different parts of a district, monitoring their results, and either expanding successful experiments and abandoning those that do not work, or combining key elements of different initiatives into new plans that can be tested on a modest scale. The Brookings study's simulations have revealed promising examples of this experimental approach: a small-schools plan that breaks up one-third of the district's elementary schools into small schools, each occupying a part of an existing school building; massive retraining in schools where climate is positive and effort is high but instruction is not improving; use of charters to create competition for low-performing or stagnant schools, especially middle and high schools; and district-managed closure and reconstitution of failed high schools. Careful monitoring of the results of such coordinated initiatives could lead to an evolving but always coherent reform strategy.

Terminate Unsuitable Arrangements

Members of school boards and civic leadership groups need to decide what the school system will no longer do as well as what it will do in the future. In particular, a reform strategy that relies on school-level initiative and that tries to maximize schools' choices of assistance options cannot simultaneously support a school central office that uses all the available school assistance funds to pay civil service salaries. Leaders who

intend schools to make their own budgetary decisions cannot simultaneously support a central audit function that requires schools to justify every deviation from a standardized expenditure plan.

There is no way to sugarcoat the fact that the existing system is buttressed—and potential reforms are hampered—by central office structures and collective bargaining agreements whose weaknesses led to the current crisis.

Experts differ on exactly what form the central office should take. But there is broad agreement on an alternative vision—that the central office should exist for the sole purpose of performing irreducibly public functions, such as authorizing schools to receive public funds, assessing the productivity of individual schools and the district as a whole, ensuring that there is a large enough supply of effective schools to permit every student to attend one, and helping students to find better alternatives if the schools have failed them. Schools would still need assistance, technical advice, staff training, and business-oriented services such as accounting, building maintenance, insurance, and legal representation. Some of these might still be offered by school district central offices, but schools cannot enjoy flexibility and be responsible for their own productivity if they cannot choose where they get help. Whenever possible, schools should be able to choose among independent service providers. Central offices should not be able to tax schools, and their income for services provided the schools should come from voluntary fees. Many extra-school functions would ultimately be provided by networks formed by the schools themselves, organizations funded by businesses and foundations, and private fee-for-service vendors.

Central offices would not employ large numbers of staff development, curriculum, or compliance specialists. The central administration could provide basic accounting and funds-allocation services for schools, and it would maintain a small staff to help schools find sources of assistance. The central office could also offer some services, such as building maintenance, food service, payroll, and negotiation with insurance and annuity providers, on a fee basis and at the discretion of individual schools. Central offices might staff or sponsor parent information centers.

Without the responsibility for instructional coordination and school operations, central administrative offices should need fewer employees.

To ensure that future superintendents are not hamstrung by past staff choices, most central office employees would serve at the pleasure of the superintendent, not as tenured civil servants. The money saved by trimming district administration would go directly to the schools.

Lay Out Timelines and Measures of Progress

Too often, local reform initiatives are set in motion without any specific plans for overseeing their operation or measuring their effects. No one can tell the difference between an effective reform or a dead one until many years later. City leaders should follow the example of Chicago, where a University of Chicago–based Consortium for School Reform has conducted hard-nosed assessments of whether schools have changed as expected. A mixture of good and bad news has forced city leaders and educators to strengthen an initially incomplete reform. The result is that Chicago leaders have not enjoyed many periods of blissful confidence that their initiatives will magically transform the schools. However, Chicago now probably has the best thought-through education reform strategy of any big city.

Chicago's monitoring strategy was devised by an independent, university-based organization. Though the school system has provided logistical support, the lion's share of funds for the monitoring program has come from local foundations and business. The multi-university Consortium on Chicago School Research is responsible for data analysis. The consortium asks others' advice on its publications, but it is free to publish results, calling the facts as the consortium sees them.

School boards and civic leaders need to insist that strategies be thought through as carefully as business plans. Establishing standards, performance baselines, benchmarks against which to measure progress, and a rigorous monitoring capability are all essential elements of a reform strategy. Monitoring plans are also good checks of the logic of a reform: if it is impossible to say what a reform effort should be accomplishing at some future time, it is very unlikely that the strategy can be effective.

Lay leaders are understandably eager to return control of the school system to professionals and elected board members. However, they must not abdicate responsibility before they establish a clear strategy of reform against which professionals can be held accountable as well as principles of progress assessment, continuous improvement, and cause-and-effect thinking.

Conclusion

Any city's reform effort can take a decade. That is a tragically long time, given the costs to children. However, unless education reform is taken seriously, as an effort requiring serious thinking, testing, careful use of evidence, and continuous refinement, America's urban public schools are likely to be no better off in ten years than they are now.

Cities can create reform strategies that make a difference. But many things must change. Scholars who invent and advocate reform ideas must adopt principles of truth-in-advocacy and swear off old habits of parallel play (working independently as if their efforts were not interdependent). Funders—national foundations that support reform initiatives and local businesses and foundations that support local reforms—must adopt the discipline of cause-and-effect thinking and refuse to be captured by ideas that are too one-sided to work. Education professionals, including teachers and their union leaders, must accept adult responsibility and make jobs contingent on performance.[13] Finally, local authorities, including mayors, school boards, superintendents, and civic leaders, must resist adopting feel-good and quick-fix reforms and commit to hard-nosed evaluation and continuous strengthening of reform initiatives.

The New York Times, September 17, 1998

New York Offers 30% Raise If Principals Drop Tenure: Union Officials Refuse to Trade Job Security

By ANEMONA HARTOCOLLIS

The Giuliani administration has offered a record raise of more than 30 percent over five years to New York City's public school principals — in exchange for giving up their right to lifetime tenure and for working a 12-month year. Negotiators for the principals have rejected it.

Administration officials said they offered the raise — which far outstrips the 11 percent for most city unions — out of determination to treat principals like professional managers and to hold them more strictly accountable for the success and failure of the city's 1.1 million schoolchildren.

Principals, however, denounced the offer yesterday as insulting and akin to slavery — saying that the increase in working hours would make the raise a wash or worse — and broke off contract negotiations. They said that forcing them to give up their job security would be tantamount to union-busting and would strike at the heart of the union's interest in protecting its 4,400 members from politics and favoritism.

Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani and Chancellor Rudy Crew have made ending tenure for principals a linchpin of their agenda to reform New York City public schools. They argue that like a corporation head or a precinct commander, the chancellor and his superintendents should have the power to demote or dismiss bad principals and to reassign good ones where they can do the most good.

Under the current system, which is part of state law, principals cannot be removed from their buildings without union approval and cannot be demoted or dismissed without often lengthy disciplinary hearings.

As part of the city's offer, the principals would agree to give up their right to tenure and would instead have a contract requiring them to meet standards, including getting students to perform at certain levels on standardized tests.

"The principals have said they're underpaid and they want to be treated more as executives, as managers," Deputy Mayor Randy L. Levine said yesterday. "But you can't have it both ways. If you want to be treated as real managers and get more money, you have to be productive for the city and the Board of Education."

Lewis H. Spence, a deputy chancellor, said the board would not back down from its drive to make principals more accountable. "If the system is going to move to rapid success, the single most powerful catalyst for educational change is strong leadership," he said yesterday.

"We came an extraordinary distance and they ran in fear," he added. He said the board wanted more flexibility to move good principals and the right to dismiss bad ones.

It is a measure of the ferocity of the battle over tenure that the administration is willing to offer principals and assistant principals much higher raises than those negotiated with teachers, police, firefighters and sanitation workers. Other city unions received 11 percent in raises over five years, or 13.3 percent including benefits, city officials said. The city offered an additional 20 percent raise to the principals, for a total package of 33.3 percent.

City officials say the raise — which they term a productivity increase — would average $18,000 to $20,000 above the raises for other city workers. For a high school principal with top pay of $83,921 after 15 years, the raise would total more than $26,000, to $109,937, and it would be $111,867 with benefits, city officials said.

James F. Hanley, the city's Commissioner of Labor Relations, called the raise "incredibly huge," but said: "Obviously, it was a package that made sense for everybody."

But it did not persuade the leadership of the Council of Supervisors and Administrators, the union for principals, assistant principals and other supervisors, which has demanded that the contract go to arbitration. The union has worked without a contract since February 1996.

Donald Singer, president of the union, predicted an exodus of principals to the suburbs, where he said they earn $25,000 more on average. He conceded that the city's offer was substantial, but said it would not make up for the rise in working hours. Under the current contract, principals work 10 months of the year; their day is now seven hours and 20 minutes. The city wants their days extended by two to three hours and the year by two months.

Clearly, however, the major issue on both sides was the battle over tenure. Mr. Singer said the city had demanded that the union go with it to the Legislature to ask for the abolition of the tenure system.

A record offer in a battle to improve school leadership.

"We're not going to be extorted," Mr. Singer said. "No one in the suburbs is being told by their board of education and their mayor to go to Albany and to abolish tenure. I don't want to use the word slavery. But someone in our executive board said that if we accepted this, we might as well be slaves."

City officials used equally harsh words. "It's really the most naive leadership," Mr. Levine said of the union. "Donald Singer I think has no comprehension of reality, let alone how to reach an agreement. I feel very badly for his members."

Raymond J. Domanico, executive director of the Public Education Association, an advocacy group that monitors city schools, said the city's proposal could attract fresh blood to a system that he said cannot attract top-quality principals. He said that he believed that the Chancellor wanted to evaluate principals fairly and "would not support some kind of witch hunt."

Reaction was mixed among rank and file principals. Several said they would willingly give up tenure if they got more control over conditions in their schools — like the ability to hire and dismiss teachers and to make other decisions without wading through deep bureaucracy. Teachers are also protected by the tenure law, but the administration argues that they are not managers, so they are entitled to different conditions.

"I personally don't have a problem with moving to management and to being viewed as a manager, and managers do work a longer year," said Alexander Corbluth, principal of the High School for Environmental Studies in Manhattan. "But with that comes the power to carry out decisions and to manage one's school as one would like to."

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Selected Readings on School Reform

Charter Schools

The new academic year brings the national charter school count above 1000. Bruno V. Manno's and Sol Stern's article, "A School Reform Whose Time Has Come," from *City Journal*, recognizes this trend and questions the reluctance of New York state policy-makers to climb on board.

To demonstrate the growth of charter schools, we need only turn to our nation's capital. According to Jay Mathews's *Washington Post* article, "Charter Schools Open to High Demand," the District of Columbia is home to the fastest growing charter program in the country. Fifteen schools, serving over 3,200 students, opened their doors this fall in the District. We then spotlight D.C.'s Paul Junior High School in "Opting Out of the D.C. System," again by Jay Mathews of *The Washington Post*. Paul is the first traditional public school in the District to consider converting to charter status.

Charter schools are also making waves outside America's big cities. In Liz Wyatt's article, "Schools Compete for Pupils, Funding," from *The Battle Creek Enquirer*, we learn how charters have injected much needed competition into a small city's education scene.

Next, Peter Huidekoper's article "A Tale of Two Grants," published in *Philanthropy* magazine, evaluates two grants made by the Gates Family Foundation for education reform efforts: one for inside-the-system "restructuring," the other for a charter school. We'll let you guess which grant had more impact.

Perhaps the Gates Foundation could teach a lesson to foundations and corporations in Connecticut. "Charter Schools in Search of Angels," by Fred Musante of *The New York Times*, details the difficulties that state's charter schools are having in obtaining start-up assistance.

Funding is not the only difficult issue with which charter schools must grapple. Chester E. Finn, Jr. and Bruno V. Manno, in their *New Democrat* piece "The 12 Labors of Charter Schools," investigate the critical questions that must be answered if charter schools are to occupy center stage in U.S. education reform efforts.

Finally, Jeffry Flake of the Goldwater Institute breaks with conventional wisdom in "Race Discrimination in Arizona." Charter schools are often accused of "creaming" white and wealthy kids, but Flake shows that magnet schools in "regular" school districts are far more apt to do this.

SMF

City Journal, Summer 1998

A School Reform Whose Time Has Come

Sol Stern and Bruno V. Manno

Charter schools are sweeping the country. Thirty-three states have passed charter school legislation, and across the nation some 800 charter schools are up and running, enrolling upward of 170,000 kids. The schools come in various sizes and flavors, from the staunchly traditional to the ultra-left wing. Their basic idea is simple: a school receives a "charter" from a school board, state education department, a university, or other agency to run for a limited time (usually five years), and it must meet strict performance standards to get its charter renewed. As long as they meet the standards, these schools—public and open to all comers—are free to skirt suffocating school district regulations and union work rules. In some states they can hire bright but uncertified teachers, just as exclusive private schools do. Most crucially, if they don't deliver, dissatisfied parents can take their kids—and the public money that accompanies them—elsewhere.

New York just squandered a golden opportunity to join the growing list of charter states. A surprising constellation of forces—a Republican governor with his eye on national office, a handful of deep-pocketed Wall Streeters, and a fiercely committed band of minority activists and legislators—had mobilized behind a bill that promised to give New York one of the strongest charter laws in the nation. Governor George Pataki's charter bill, had it passed undiluted, would have powerfully challenged the state's public education monopoly and would have exerted strong pressure on New York's dysfunctional public schools to do better. Yet, though it was difficult to find anyone in Albany who admitted to being opposed to charter schools, the education system's interests, led by the teachers' unions, prevented it from coming to a vote in the state's proverbially undemocratic and venal Legislature.

If you want to know what New York's kids have been missing, just visit the resoundingly successful Boston Renaissance School, one of the country's largest charter schools. Boston Renaissance is the brainchild of the nonprofit Horace Mann Foundation, whose trustees, certain that they could do better than the city's failed public school system, took advantage of Massachusetts' 1993 charter school law and obtained a charter from the state education department to start their own elementary school.

In short order, the trustees settled on a location and came up with an innovative educational program. With the Massachusetts Land Bank's help, the foundation acquired space in a nondescript 12-story former office building in downtown Boston. Then they hired the Edison Project—entrepreneur Chris Whittle's for-profit education management firm—to design everything from testing tools to staff development. Most important, Edison provided a curriculum based on the sturdiest educational research. It included a phonics-based reading program, and it set clear-cut goals for every grade.

Choosing its students by lottery, as state law demands, Boston Renaissance opened in September 1995 with 637 students in grades K through 5 (including, as the law requires, kids with disabilities and special-education students). Two years later, the school enrolled 1,050 students—80 percent of them minorities—in grades K through 8. A waiting list of 1,000 kids exists for the few seats that become available each year. Thus far, the new school has performed better than even its early supporters might have hoped: a recent Massachusetts Department of Education study found that, while Boston Renaissance's students scored below the national average on standardized tests when they entered the school, after one year they performed at or above grade levels.

One reason Boston Renaissance works so well is that it has more flexibility than does a traditional public school to tackle problems. For example, though the school's downtown location brought wonderful benefits—a safe neighborhood and easy access to Boston's rich history and culture—the cramped office building had no space for a cafeteria. With no school board bureaucrats tripping it up, Boston Renaissance was able to respond in a way unthinkable for a typical public school: a private vendor would bring prepared lunches, heat them in microwave ovens, and then distribute them to the classrooms.

The absence of a union contract adds to the school's flexibility. Boston Renaissance administrators can, for example, ask teachers to stay with their kids during lunch. These in-class lunches with the teacher present work marvelously: in one fifth-grade classroom, children sat quietly, eating at their tables, while their teacher, Kathy O'Flaherty, calmly chatted with a few kids—a refreshingly domestic and civil scene for anyone used to the escalating chaos of a typical public school cafeteria.

Free from union work rules, teachers spend more time at school. Boston Renaissance offers 200 instructional days a year, 20 more than other Boston public schools. The school day is also longer: sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-grade students arrive at 7:30 AM, and don't leave until 3:30 PM, while teachers must be in the school from 7 in the morning to 4 in the afternoon. At least once a week, the school requires teachers to stay late for a staff meeting. And teachers must show up at least one week before the school year opens—five days earlier than in most public schools—for administrative and planning sessions.

Boston Renaissance's flexibility extends to the way it organizes teaching and how it pays its teachers. The school arranges teachers in teams and has master teachers supervise the work of less experienced colleagues. Ordinary teachers take home about the same pay they would in most public schools, though master teachers can earn more. Master teachers, in effect, receive merit pay—an idea teachers' unions strongly oppose—for what they've accomplished and how much they've learned. And, a huge difference from union-dominated public school systems, Boston Renaissance can fire teachers who don't measure up to its standards.

Since charter school teachers lack tenure and serve under renewable performance contracts, it must be hard to find good help, right? Wrong: resumés swamp Boston Renaissance from frustrated teachers who work for the region's other public schools. Kathy O' Flaherty (who once taught in the Newton Public Schools) explains why: "We don't have to wait to make changes," she says. "We don't have to wait for the district to decide that what we are doing is within the rules. Also, we don't need the approval of the union. So we can really put the interests of the kids first."

Esterjuana Gliwinsky, Boston Renaissance's acting principal, agrees: the absence of red tape lets administrators and teachers do their jobs. "Unlike regular public schools," she explains, "we don't have to defend the indefensible. If a teacher doesn't work out, we can get rid of that teacher. If I can buy books at the book mart across the street for $1, I don't have to wait to order the same book through the district for $6." Gliwinsky came to the school as a fourth-grade teacher from Rochester, where she was once named New York's elementary school teacher of the year. A former union activist, she now believes that public education won't improve without charters shaking things up.

Indeed, one reason charter schools are such a great idea is that their competitive example might jolt the public school system to loosen its stranglehold on its own schools—as happened in Massachusetts after the state passed the charter school law. Fearing it would lose students to schools like Boston Renaissance, the Boston School Committee and the teachers' union decided to prove the regular school system could innovate, too. In an historic agreement, the two parties agreed to launch six Boston "pilot schools" with many of the same freedoms the state charter schools now enjoy, to forestall greater change.

Boston Renaissance is a completely new school, a "start-up," but other charters, like Los Angeles's Fenton Avenue School, are "conversions" of existing public schools. When Joe Lucente, Fenton Avenue's current principal, first came to the school in the early nineties, it was still part of the gigantic Los Angeles Unified School District. "I had heard stories about how bad it was, how it went through four principals in five years," Lucente recalls. "Then I met the district superintendent, and he described to me for over an hour in graphic terms how bad it really was." What Lucente heard was truly bleak: poor pupil attendance and poorer academic performance, low staff morale, a plague of gang activity, and a pervasive atmosphere of despair and violence. A blunt University of Southern California evaluator called Fenton Avenue "a hellhole."

For a couple of years, Lucente worked hard to improve the school, with little success; he began to think it was time to quit. Then, in 1993, the California Legislature passed a charter law, and

Lucente decided to try again to turn Fenton Avenue around—this time by converting it into a charter school. In 1994, he and his staff won a fight to secede from the city district and to operate independently through a state charter. The first task: to decrease class size. Hiring private vendors for food services and cutting administrative fat, the school saved enough money to add teachers and reduce class size from 30 to 20 for grades K to 3, and from 30 to 25 for grades 4 to 6. The savings also allowed Fenton Avenue to add after-school and Saturday programs, and even to rescind a 10 percent teacher pay cut that the district had previously ordered.

Within two years, Fenton Avenue had boosted student achievement significantly. On the California Test of Basic Skills—which covers math, reading, and writing—student scores jumped 16 percent the first year. After year two, scores for English-speaking students had increased an additional 5.5 percent, while for Spanish-speaking kids they went up a dramatic 28.7 percent. Impressed by such improved student performance, the state education department named Fenton Avenue a "California Distinguished Elementary School" in 1997, and Superintendent of Instruction Diane Easton called it "one of the nation's finest schools."

Perhaps Fenton Avenue's most impressive achievement, though, is the progress it has made in its novel technology program. Critics derided the lofty idea behind the plan as sheer fantasy: to create a technological infrastructure for the school "as good as the most technologically advanced university in the country." Fenton Avenue spent $1.3 million of its 1996–97 budget to put the plan into effect. The result: every classroom now hums with multimedia computers, VCRs and CD players, satellite and cable TV. The school even has a broadcast studio, allowing students and staff to tape their own shows on FCB—Fenton Channel Broadcasting. Two sixth-grade classrooms have realized Fenton's technological dream: a computer on every desk in this inner-city school.

While technology by itself is almost never the solution to educational failure, Fenton Avenue's wired classroom is not technology just for the sake of it. Instead, the electronic capacity enables staff and students to access an extraordinary range of curriculum materials they wouldn't ordinarily have: the class now takes a dozen electronic field trips around the world each year, seeing and hearing, to take one example, scientists who walk them through the dazzling flora and wildlife of subtropical Africa. It's a salutary example of technology supplementing, not replacing, good pedagogy.

Not all charters are as effective as Boston Renaissance or Fenton Avenue. Some, faced with overwhelming start-up costs, have fallen apart, while others have been frauds. Many states don't yet have the mechanisms in place to help legitimate charter schools surmount their early difficulties or to help parents smoke out humbug.

You can read about the charter schools that have stumbled in Thomas Toch's recent cover article in *U.S. News and World Report*. In Michigan, Toch recounts, ruthless profiteers founded charter schools on sites they owned—and then squeezed exorbitant rents from them. Also in Michigan, one Afrocentric charter school, instead of observing Lincoln's or Washington's Birthday, celebrated "Malcolm X Memorial Day" and various other African holidays, stoking a fervid multiculturalism that would prove deeply divisive if it spread through inner-city schools. In Arizona, Toch found, a few charter schools practiced flagrant nepotism in admissions.

But unlike traditional public schools, if you don't like what you find, you can get out. Nor do charter schools escape scrutiny the way typical public schools do: if a charter flunks, it's far more likely to get shut down or to have its weaknesses exposed than is a traditional public school. At least a dozen charters have been closed so far, and with five-year reviews coming due for many, the number of closings will only grow.

Still, despite the occasional bad charter school, it's clear that many Americans are desperate for alternatives to failing public schools, and nowhere more so than in inner-city neighborhoods, where parents grasp at charter schools, tuition tax credits, vouchers—anything to get their kids out of a system that effectively condemns many of them to a bleak future. And what's ultimately telling is that charter schools are so popular with those who know them best: the kids, parents, and teachers directly involved. A Hudson Institute study one of us co-authored discovered that most charter students find their schoolwork interesting, respect their teachers, and will probably stay enrolled. Parents usually remain satisfied with charter schools, the study showed, while teachers often find professional fulfillment in working for one. Satisfaction is highest when what's at stake is immediately educational—class size, curriculum, teaching. It is lowest when attention turns to non-educational worries—food services, school facilities, sports—a vivid sign that charters are deploying their limited means on what really counts

The politics of charter schools are tricky. It's hard to find anyone in public life these days who opposes the basic charter school concept—something you couldn't say about school vouchers. The charter school movement makes for strange bedfellows, from President Clinton to ex-education secretary and virtue pundit William Bennett. Even the powerful national teachers' unions say they're on board: "Charter laws give educators and parents the chance to create the schools of their dreams," enthuses National Education Association head Bob Chase. "Let me first take credit for charter schools," announced Thomas Hobart, president of New York State United Teachers, at a recent charter conference. "Over a decade ago at the National Press Club," Hobart claimed, "[American Federation of Teachers head] Al Shanker stood up and said we should have charter schools."

Beyond the rhetoric, however, big differences loom. Teachers' union leaders have a very specific idea of what a charter school should be—and it's nothing like Boston Renaissance or Fenton Avenue. In a 1996 report, Shanker's AFT held up Rhode Island's charter school law as the model for other states. But Rhode Island forces charters to follow existing collective bargaining agreements and says they can't hire uncertified teachers and administrators—throwing out a key ingredient that makes charter schools work. The state's legislation is so restrictive that, to date, Rhode Island has just one charter school. By borrowing the language of charters, teachers' unions can claim to celebrate "school choice" while in fact they continue to fight it. Charters become a firewall to prevent further reform.

Many charter school supporters, on the other hand, view charters as a first step toward *greater* choice. Arizona's elected state superintendent of education, Lisa Graham Keegan, for example, has been one of the country's most enthusiastic advocates of charters. The state now has 250 charter schools, in large part thanks to her. But Keegan turned to charters only when, as a state legislator, she failed to get a voucher law passed; for her, charters are a second-best option that will, by whetting the public's appetite for choice, breach the public education fortress and win the day for a fully competitive voucher system.

In New York, the teachers' union has always set the terms for education reform, so it's no surprise that the state lags behind most of the country when it comes to challenging the public school status quo. As the largest contributor to New York political campaigns, the union has profoundly influenced the drafting of education bills. One egregious case from the mid-1980s: the misnamed Excellence in Teaching Bill. The bill added $1,000 to the annual salary of every teacher in New York City—whether excellent, mediocre, or completely inept in the classroom.

In the Legislature, neither party has had any interest in education reform. Democrats are creatures of the teachers' union, but even Republican legislators, like their Democratic colleagues, mainline teachers' union campaign money, so they're loath to criticize the monopoly that supplies it. And many Republicans don't really care: they tend to represent upstate constituencies that are happy with their local schools and that dismiss education reform as an inner-city concern. As one leading Republican assemblyman once told *City Journal*, "Education isn't one of our issues."

But during Governor Pataki's first term, the national debate on education reform began to shift—against the public school monopoly. A host of other Republican governors, including Tommy Thompson of Wisconsin and Pete Wilson of California, scored significant political victories in prodding reluctant state legislatures to consider reform. Voters increasingly associated Democrats with stubborn teachers' unions and wretched inner-city schools. Suddenly, education had become a conservative issue. Sometime during the past 18 months—perhaps when he began to dream about national office—Governor Pataki joined the reformist trend with his charter school bill.

As charter bills go, Pataki's was as good as they get. Under it, several agencies could have chartered new schools: the state education department, of course, but also local boards of education, a new state chartering agency, and even the mayors of the state's largest cities. The bill permitted charter startups and made room for converting existing public schools, and, unlike charter laws in many states, it wouldn't have put an upper limit on the number of charters. New York's charter schools could have hired uncertified teachers for their talent; principals could at last have managed their schools free from restrictive union work rules. Picture it: exciting schools sprouting in Bedford Stuyvesant, Harlem, the South Bronx—everywhere hopelessness is endemic and the old system is in greatest disrepair.

Pataki proposed such a strong bill only because an unusual coalition held his feet to the fire on reform. On the right, there was Change-NY, a conservative lobbying group founded by several prominent Wall Streeters that has raised millions of dollars for Pataki; and there was John Faso, the dynamic Republican minority leader in the State Assembly, who grasps the political potential of charters to bring Republicans and minorities together. At the coalition's center was the Center for Educational Innovation (affiliated with the Manhattan Institute), which laid the public groundwork for charters through a series of cogent, well-attended forums. And on the left was an informal group of black and Hispanic activists that included ex-representative Floyd Flake; Gail Foster, president of the Toussaint Institute, a community-based organization that helps inner-city parents find alternatives to the public schools; and Brooklyn Assemblyman Roger Green. The fact that support for charter schools spans New York's political spectrum is a sign of how intolerable the public school monopoly has grown. And the coalition is not going to go away. As Thomas Carroll, Executive Director of Change-NY, stresses: "The 'strange bedfellows' coalition for charter schools in New York grows stronger with each passing day; there's no doubt charter legislation will be adopted—either at the end-of-year legislative session, or at the latest, next year."

That minority leaders like Flake, Foster, and Green all embrace charter schools reflects the changing political alignments in the minority community over education reform. During the past two years, polls have found strong support among blacks—60 to 70 percent—for school choice. One index of support for school choice is that in New York last year, 20,000 black and Hispanic parents applied for a chance to receive one of 1,300 private school scholarships, worth $1,400 each, from the School Choice Scholarships Foundation.

Charter schools raise the question of what is public education? For too long, the only approved answer came from teachers' unions and their supporters: it's an education, they said, that unionized government bureaucracies provide with taxpayer money. But what's central to the idea of public education is public funding, public standards, and schools open to all—not government employees and a one-size-fits-all institution. In theory, a system composed entirely of charter schools, in which public money follows each pupil to the school of his choice, would be no less a public school system than the monopoly system that so badly educates urban children today.

Recent developments underscore how strongly the public school monopoly is besieged. On June 9, investment banker Theodore Forstmann, Wal-Mart director John Walton, and several other wealthy philanthropists announced a $200 million national fund for 50,000 private school scholarships—that is, vouchers—for low-income students. The next day, the Wisconsin Supreme Court ruled that Milwaukee's school choice program was constitutional and that it could provide 15,000 publicly funded vouchers for pupils to use in religious or secular private schools—a huge victory for school choice supporters. And on June 15 came the news that Arthur Levine, president of Columbia's Teachers College—the Mother Church of the public school status quo—backed vouchers, as long as they weren't used for religious schools. All this means that, within a year or two, at least an additional 65,000 children, and probably many more, will be able to opt out of poor public schools across the country, and the demand for more choice will grow.

The tide is turning for how we think about public education. For the moment, the public school monopoly has successfully persuaded the New York Legislature to resist the current of modernity, but it's only a matter of time before even New York gets swept along. A charter school law soon seems all but inevitable—and that's likely not to be the most radical reform in store. •

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The Washington Post, September 9, 1998

Charter Schools Open to High Demand

With 4,000 Students Already Enrolled, Many Programs Receiving Additional Requests

By Jay Mathews
Washington Post Staff Writer

The mother sitting in John Pannell's office yesterday begged him to admit her second-grader to Pannell's new charter school in Southeast Washington. Like many other charter principals, he was already at his enrollment limit—but he was willing to make a deal.

"You are going to owe me 80 hours of parental involvement," he said, building his long list of parents who have promised to aid teachers, chaperon field trips or do whatever else is necessary to have their children be part of a new era of independently operated public schools in the city.

About 3,200 students began the school year in the new schools yesterday, giving the District the fastest-growing charter school system in the country and raising both hopes and concerns about the future of public education. A few charter schools opened earlier. Another opens next week, and one more in January, giving the city a total of 19 taxpayer-funded, independent schools. Dozens more are applying for charter status in 1999.

At the Waterside Mall in Southwest Washington, where two new charter schools are stuffed into temporary quarters in a basement storage area, one parent tried bribery to get her child in the program.

"How much money can I give you to get my child in that school?" a mother asked Eugene Williams Sr., co-founder of the Washington Mathematics Science Technology Public Charter High School. He declined, noting that charter schools are still public schools and thus are tuition-free.

His ninth-through-12th-grade academy, once part of Ballou Senior High School, had planned to take 175 students, but co-founder and Principal Mary H. Johnson said there is so much demand that 200 have been accepted.

The space, two levels below ground, is clean and well-lighted, with classes held behind cubicle dividers. But some students noted its resemblance to a bomb shelter and asked to slip up to the mall for a shopping break.

"Sorry, baby," Williams said more than once. "It's a closed campus."

Temporary inconveniences, with many schools still undergoing renovation, have not dampened parents' ardor. About 4,000 students will be in charter schools this year, and many parents are trying to add to that total.

"We're getting 20 calls a day," said Virginia Walden, director of outreach for Friends of Choice in Urban Schools (FOCUS), a pro-charter group.

Only one school seemed to have any space left, however. Linda Moore, executive director of the Stokes Community Freedom Public Charter School in Northwest Washington, said she had room for about 20 more kindergartners or first-graders.

Charter schools are public schools that operate with public money but are independent of the central administration. Supporters say they offer parents a choice and will force traditional schools to improve. Opponents say charter schools will drain the most involved parents and motivated students from the regular system.

The parents dropping their children off yesterday had clearly done their homework on the new alternative to the neighborhood public school. "I used the Internet. I made a lot of phone calls," said Callie Williams, a D.C. government employee who enrolled her 5-year-old son, Hezekiah, in Pannell's Edison-Friendship Public Charter School.

Williams said she and her husband, a mortgage banker, were impressed by the Edison Project, a for-profit company that has 50 other schools nationwide. She said she liked plans for intensive use of computers, a longer school day and a longer school year.

Cassandra Bradsher, a D.C. educational aide, and Eugene O'Carroll, a machine operator, said they liked their local school, Miner Elementary in Northeast Washington. But they put their fourth-grader, Sharnia, and their kindergartners, twins Eugene and Eugenia, in Edison-Friendship because Sharnia is so far ahead of her grade level.

"They kept saying they were looking for more things for Sharnia to do," Bradsher said.

Norm Johnson, director of the Integrated Design Electronics Academy (IDEA) at the old Taft Elementary School, said 85 high school students signed up. The school initially planned to limit itself to 60 students but now expects a total enrollment of 110 in a few weeks when they move to permanent quarters at the former Phelps High School.

Johnson's math and science academy and Irasema Salcido's Cesar Chavez Public Policy Charter High School hope to leave the Waterside Mall basement by Nov. 1 for 35,000 renovated square feet in a nearby building with large windows. The academy has raised $2.5 million to take over the unused Franklin Building in Northwest Washington next year.

The Washington Post, July 17, 1998

Opting Out of D.C. System; Paul Junior High Seeks to Become Charter School

By Jay Mathews

Paul Junior High School in Northwest Washington has applied to become the first public school to defect completely from the D.C. public school system and become a charter school next year, teachers and a private partner said yesterday.

The application for charter school status by the 730-student school, considered one of the best-run in the city, is a blow to efforts by Superintendent Arlene Ackerman to reform the beleaguered system from within—and a boon to the movement to create more charter schools, which run independently but use taxpayer funds.

"It's incredible," said Virginia F. Walden, director of community outreach for Friends of Choice in Urban Schools (FOCUS), a pro-charter group. "It shows that people are really interested in finding ways to bring quality back to the schools."

For Paul to apply to the D.C. Public Charter School Board for charter status, officials at the school had to collect signatures from two-thirds of the parents of students enrolled last school year and two-thirds of faculty members.

Lex Towle, managing director of the nonprofit AppleTree Institute for Education Innovation, which helped with the application, said Principal Cecile Middleton and other Paul officials convinced parents that the school needed to free itself from what has been a sluggish and disorganized D.C. school bureaucracy.

"She said we can have a much better school if the administrators and teachers are not responding to useless surveys and meetings and can create our own curriculum and courses," Towle said. Middleton, widely admired as an organizer and innovator, rarely speaks to the news media and did not return two telephone calls. Her secretary told a reporter who visited her office that she did not want to be interviewed.

Kurt Becker, an English as a Second Language teacher, said he wants to leave the D.C. school system so that he and other Paul teachers can play a larger role in running the school. "It will mean a better quality of education for the kids," he said.

Residents interviewed yesterday in the Paul neighborhood, a mostly middle- and lower-middle income area along northern Georgia Avenue, said they had not heard of the charter proposal. But one local resident, Teresa Jones, said she thought the change might be good for her younger sister, who will be a Paul seventh-grader this fall.

One Paul teacher who asked not to be identified said she did not support the move because parents who don't want to send their children to a charter school will have as their only other option a regular middle school at least two miles away. One Paul staff member who also requested anonymity said she thought students had signed their parents' names to some of the supporting petitions, although she offered no evidence. Walden, who lives near Paul and helps run the FOCUS group promoting charter schools, said her neighbors have signed the petition "and are very excited about the change."

The largest D.C. public school conversion so far has been the science and mathematics program at Ballou High, which plans to open as the 200-student Washington MST (Math Science Technology) Public Charter High School this fall.

Charter schools are public schools that operate with public money but are independent from the central school administration. Supporters say they will offer parents a choice in public education and force traditional schools to improve to avoid losing students. Opponents say such schools will drain the most involved parents and most motivated students from the regular system.

Three charter schools have been established in the city and 16 more are expected to open this fall. Officials at the congressionally sanctioned D.C. Public School Charter School Board declined to comment on the application or name the other 12 applicants for 1999 until a public hearing, which is scheduled for Aug. 13 at the Israel Baptist Church.

John Fiegel, director of the U.S. Education Department's public charter schools program, said only 25 percent of the 800 charter schools in the country are former public schools. About 62 percent are newly created, like most of the D.C. charter schools, and 13 percent are converted private schools.

Towle said the new charter school will emphasize academics and the arts and will be sponsored by a partnership including the current Paul staff, Towle's institute, the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and the national consulting firm Booz-Allen & Hamilton Inc.

The Battle Creek Enquirer, June 28, 1998

Schools Compete for Pupils, Funding

By Liz Wyatt

Charter academies, Edison Project provide alternatives for local parents

LIZ WYATT
The Enquirer

As several new schools prepare to open in the Battle Creek area two months from now, competition is starting to drive education here in new directions.

The influx of new choices already is changing the scene for educators who are keeping an eye on their presence and for parents who demand more alternatives.

DOUG ALLEN/THE ENQUIRER

Endeavor Charter Academy is being built on Upton Avenue. The K-5 school is scheduled to open Aug. 31.

"I think the fact that we are given a choice as parents is exciting to me," said Battle Creek parent Beth Russell.

Russell's daughter, Courtney, is one of more than 280 students signed up so far for three charter schools – public schools run independently – opening here in August.

The enrollment drive is still going on, but the charters could draw up to more than 600 students if all the spaces are filled by the new school year.

While that's just roughly 3 percent of the local student body, the numbers are high enough to grab the attention of some schools that are losing those students.

The changes may force some districts in the long run to trim staff, add programs and market their programs in ways they have never had to before.

"We are in a different kind of position right now. We do have to be more assertive about marketing our schools," said Mike Bitar, superintendent of Battle Creek Public Schools. The district has been losing students steadily in recent years; and charter schools are projected to add to that loss even more this year, putting new pressures on the budget.

Battle Creek Public Schools also is offering two new choices this year through a partnership with The Edison Project, a private school-management firm that will run Washington and Wilson Elementary schools. Those schools are not new. But Edison programs such as elementary Spanish, computers in every home and a longer school day and year, are all new.

Washington already has received more applications, including some from out of the district, than it had students enrolled last year. But enrollment at Wilson to date is lagging below that of last year.

While the three charters and two Edison schools are all different, each is making parental involvement part of its sales pitch. The charters also are emphasizing back-to-basics instruction and moral lessons – qualities with strong appeal for parents who see a lack of those in the traditional schools.

"Both my husband and I have literally lost sleep with everything going on in school," Russell said. She plans for Courtney, 5, to go to kindergarten at Endeavor Charter Academy instead of Battle Creek Public Schools. "The violence going on in the schools and the lack of parent participation has literally made us lose sleep."

CHOICES MAKE CHANGES

Choice proponents long have contended that increased competition will make all schools better by forcing improvements.

"If I were a superintendent and I wanted to make improvements, I

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would love a charter school in my boundaries," said Mark DeHaan, a vice president at National Heritage Academies. The company is opening Endeavor Charter Academy in Springfield. "You have a reason. You have a cause."

Officials at traditional public and private schools claim they already are excelling and competition will only give them a chance to showcase that. Charter schools will fill a niche for some, but they are convinced many parents will continue to be satisfied with their schools. But they also say there's is always room for improvement. And if more choices helps drive it, they are welcome.

"We're proud of the educational environment and the Christian environment we promote, but we can always do better," said Don Perkins, principal of Battle Creek Academy, which has about 200 students in K-12. "I think the competition is good. If it encourages the private schools and the public schools to do better in their educational efforts, I think that is great."

When charters come into a community, the existing schools often respond with increased communication or instructional changes, said Bruno Manno, a senior fellow at the Hudson Institute, a conservative think-tank that put out a charter school report last year. If a new charter, for example, offers pre-school, it might drive the schools already there to add a preschool program, too, Manno said.

"You begin to see all these little things happen," he said. "You begin to see them respond in different ways to all the things on people's minds."

Harper Creek Community Schools, a growing district of about 2,700 students, is not expected to suffer a significant student loss this year like other districts. But that is not to say the district is not preparing for the competition brought on by Battle Creek's five new choices.

One of the reasons Harper Creek started Spanish instruction at its elementary schools last year was because they knew The Edison Project, being considered by Battle Creek Public Schools at the time, offers it.

"Part of that was to position ourselves to be competitive," Buresh said. "We also believe it's the right thing to do."

EDUCATION UNDER THE SPOTLIGHT

Five charters have opened in the Lansing area in recent years, resulting in the initial loss of an estimated 1,000 students from the Lansing School District, said Rossi Ray-Taylor, deputy superintendent for instruction.

Some 300 have returned to the district of 19,5000 children. But the loss, combined with additional losses from other factors, was enough to make the district re-examine itself and put in place aggressive marketing that included television ads during the 1998 Winter Olympics.

"We need to really try to reinforce making sure our public knows about programs we have," Ray-Taylor said. She said it's too soon to tell what kind of effect it has had.

But marketing cannot be just for the sake of marketing, said Gary Huggins, executive director of the Education Leaders Council, a Washington D.C.-based reform-minded group. Schools have to back it up with good programs. And those that cannot, will have to improve, he said.

For those that can, new marketing efforts are good because they make schools communicate more with parents, he said.

"It's a very healthy response to that kind of competition," Huggins said. "They now have to convince parents that there's a good reason to send children to their schools."

Some districts here already know they will also have to set aside part of their budgets to step up marketing efforts. Lakeview School District is planning to hire personnel to oversee marketing and media relations, a move prompted by a lengthy community involvement process this year.

"That was going to happen anyway, but we need to do it now because the charter schools are doing it," said Superintendent Bob Spencer.

And Battle Creek's Bitar said he will not be surprised if part of the district's budget goes to marketing. He's not sure yet what that entails, but that will likely include increased communication with "customers" - part of the business lingo now commonly used among educators.

Charters already are sending mailers, offering information meetings with video presentations and a picnic to attract parents. Battle Creek Public Schools also is out touting The Edison Project, with staff recently handing out fliers about it at the Cereal Festival and World's Longest Breakfast Table.

Competition is not just between new and existing schools, but also among the five new choices trying to lure students.

"Because there are five alternatives, I don't think any of the five is going to get full enrollment," said Lisa Letarte, director of operations for the Foundation for Behavioral Resources, which is opening Arbor Academy here. "What you have happening here is this huge impact all at once."

Educators ultimately are waiting until the start of the school year and beyond to see what changes will unfold. While there are still many unknowns, one certainty choices here have achieved is to turn the public's attention to education.

"That's good," Buresh said. "I think that's the best thing charters are going to do - (make) education a focal issue."

Philanthropy, September/October 1998

A Tale of Two Grants

One of which we wish we never made

By Peter Huidekoper

A MORE ACCURATE TITLE FOR THIS ARTICLE might be "A Tale of Two Strategies." The two strategies were applied by a foundation seeking to encourage public education reform in Colorado. One produced results. The other didn't. As a program officer at the Gates Family Foundation in Denver from 1990 to 1996, I had the chance to follow some 40 grants—totaling over $4 million—the trustees made to a variety of reform efforts over that time. When I look back now at the results of those grants, the differences seem telling.

One of the reform efforts sought to change existing schools from the inside. That change did not happen. The second, involving so-called "charter schools," sought to help create some new schools and new choices. That goal has been met.

RESTRUCTURING IN 10 HIGH SCHOOLS

OF THE $4 MILLION GATES INVESTED IN PUBLIC education reform, close to $1 million was directed at two different restructuring efforts in ten high schools. After five years of funding, we knew of few dramatic changes or improvements at those ten schools. The foundation's early hope was to support a small number of high schools in the belief that their successful changes would encourage others to follow suit. That expectation proved to be an illusion. By the fourth year of Gates support, a couple of the schools no longer even wanted our funds, or could not even figure out how to put the money to good use.

A Gates-funded four-year evaluation of student achievement at four of the schools found "no consistent changes across all four schools," although it did find that "individual schools tended to have minor improvement in one or two measures with others remaining the same." Today, three years after the money ran out, I doubt whether a single school would claim to be committed to the restructuring ideas supported by Gates funds.

WHAT HAPPENED?

FIRST, IT WAS NEVER ENTIRELY CLEAR THAT THE faculties or the principals at these schools were excited about making the changes our funds were supposed to advance. In a couple of schools the outside money fostered faculty quarrels. Administrative turnover was a factor as well. When new principals came on board at some of the schools they felt no ownership or obligation to the effort. Second, the community around the school in some cases did not know about or support the changes—a new school board would be voted in and the reform efforts would be pushed aside. And third, one of the efforts was closely tied in with two large organizations, the Colorado Department of Education and the Education Commission of the States, neither of which could—or would, for political reasons—advocate for it.

CHARTER SCHOOLS

AND NOW FOR THE CHARTER GRANTS, WHICH sought to help create a variety of good new schools and new choices. That goal has been met. Ten new schools open this fall, bringing to 60 the number of Colorado charter schools opened over the past six years. It all started in the fall of 1992, when the Gates trustees sponsored a one-day conference (at a cost of $10,000) to examine the potential of charter schools. The featured speakers were key players in the establishment of charters in Minnesota and California, the first two states to pass charter school legislation. That conference lit a fire under several Colorado policymakers and educators, and six months later the new charter school bill became law.

Soon after, Gates made a grant of $36,000 to a non-profit organization, the Colorado Children's Campaign (CCC). It is both surprising and telling

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that Gates found itself sending an education reform grant to an organization staffed by non-educators, who initially did not know a great deal about school reform. And yet during that first year it was the Colorado Children's Campaign that stood as the most passionate voice on behalf of education reform. As an organization representing families and children, CCC knew that public schools were not serving many children well, that competition was needed to energize the public schools, and that families wanted a greater voice or a greater chance to participate in the life of their schools. Charter schools spoke to these concerns.

When the first few charter schools opened, CCC brought the school heads together for a series of meetings, which in turn resulted in the creation of the Colorado League of Charter Schools, a statewide non-profit association. A year later, the Gates Foundation made a start-up contribution to the League, a front-loaded three-year $100,000 grant. Today the League is in its fourth year, has grown increasingly self-sufficient, and plays a vital role for most of the state's charter schools. Almost all of the state's 50 charter schools are paying members.

Looking at these two different approaches and the dollar figures attached, note the contrast: $1 million and little to show for it, versus $146,000 and an ever growing number of new charter schools around the state—14 in 1994, 24 in 1995, 32 in 1996, 50 in 1997, and now some 60 charter schools in Colorado this fall. Of course, almost all of the money needed to open these schools has come not from Gates but from families and businesses in each community. Gates and some other foundations have helped on occasion, but the vast majority of these schools opened without any foundation support. Their professional and curriculum development has been strengthened by some foundation grants, but the key ingredient has been the uncompensated personal energies of parents and educators sitting around dining room tables.

IN HINDSIGHT

IN LOOKING BACK, AND IN SEEKING SOME "LESSONS learned," it is easier now to see some other differences between these two strategies. In trying to help high schools change from within:

- The foundation's funds were tied in with a preexisting culture that was highly resistant to change. While we saw some leadership, we also saw inertia and too many people who really were not all that keen on doing things differently.
- We saw schools trying to do a hundred different things at once, but unable or unwilling to define a clear purpose. Public schools have been accused, half-facetiously, of having mission statements of: "You Name It, We Start It." Some of our high schools suffered from that affliction too. Gates's restructuring agenda became just one more thing to try to do.
- These public schools seldom had much control over their own budget, so changes they sought, such as smaller classes, were hard to achieve.
- The restructuring grants had only the most modest relationship to the wider community outside the school walls.

In contrast, in helping the charter school effort:

- Gates found individuals who came from *outside* the system—the squeaky wheels, dissatisfied parents, and restless educators who thought they could create and offer something better for children in their community and who finally had an outlet to try to make that happen.
- We found that because little came easily to most of these schools in their early stages, they were infused with a high degree of passion, commitment, and enthusiasm.
- We found parents and teachers were the critical reason these schools actually looked inviting and performed well. Parents dedicated untold hours of volunteer work in the start-up years painting, building walls, and rounding up furniture. Teachers demonstrated phenomenal dedication, even with few of the customary resources.
- We found schools whose mission statements insisted on small classes, for example, a guiding principle that they were not going to compromise on even if funds were tight. And with charters, they did have control of the full budget.

Two strategies, two dramatically different results. Two stories, one full of frustration and disappointment, the other rich with promise and hope. Much more could be said about why the conditions seemed so much more favorable with the charter school effort, and why that investment has brought a much larger return. And more could be said of what one foundation perhaps should have known years ago, and had to learn the hard way. But I'll close by simply saying, learn we did.

The New York Times, September 6, 1998

Charter Schools in Search of Angels

By FRED MUSANTE

THE state's 12 charter schools are beginning their second year, and their founders and supporters say they have learned some tough lessons about putting organizational autonomy and entrepreneurial spirit into public education.

To their surprise, foundations and corporations have largely refused to help them; they have found themselves cut off from some government educational grants; management issues proved more important than they thought, and the costs of renting and renovating school space and providing equipment has left some on shaky financial ground.

In spite of their problems, however, charter school leaders say the experience has been exhilarating, and they continue to be enthusiastic about the future of their schools. Apparently, students and their ' parents are, too. Each of the 12 schools that started last year, even those that experienced the rockiest beginnings, and the 4 new charter schools that opened for this school year, have waiting lists.

A VOICE FOR REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS

Gordon Bruno, of the Connecticut Center for School Change, discusses the state's public school system. "Municipal boundaries,' he says, "stand in the way of the profound message that these are all our students." Page 3.

"There's a real client satisfaction," observed Gordon Bruno, executive director of the Center for School Change, a Hartford-based educational reform organization that helped the schools form the Connecticut Charter School Association and supported its lobbying efforts in the state capitol.

Pleas from the association moved the legislature to increase the charter schools' per pupil reimbursement to $6,500 a year from $6,000. The greater amount is still 10 to 20 percent less than what the average public school spends, and it must also cover the cost of leasing and renovating classroom space, which school districts typically provide outside their instructional budgets.

"The facilities issue was the most difficult one," said the state's Education Commissioner, Theodore S. Sergi. Every one of the charter schools struggled with it. But Mr. Sergi defended the state's response as a sizeable increase, and noted that when Federal funds are included, charter schools will receive $7,000 a year for each pupil. That's more than some public schools in Connecticut's rural northeast get, he said.

The most successful charter schools were those that exercised tight financial management, had a well-defined curriculum and good parent relations, he said. Luck finding adequate quarters at a reasonable price was also important.

The charter schools provide innovative curriculums with small class sizes. It isn't the state's reimbursement level that presents the most serious problem, but rather the state's cap on the number of students they can serve, says William Jawitz, a chairman of the Charter School Association and a founder of the Odyssey Community

School, a middle school in Manchester. The legislature has taken a go-slow approach to charter schools due to the state's native Yankee cautiousness and a reluctance to spend more money, said Mr. Jawitz. Although the total number authorized was raised to 1,500 from 1,000 last year, that is still covers only a tiny fraction of the state's total public school enrollment of 540,000.

Mr. Jawitz said foundations and corporations approached for help said the legislature's mincing approach had not convinced them that the state was committed to charter schools, and they didn't want to provide support as a stopgap while it made up its mind. He said he believes that part of the problem is that the legislature has treated charter schools as an add-on rather than a component of the public schools.

A few have received outside help. The Odyssey Community School, for example, got video production equipment from a private company, and the Side-by-Side Community School in Norwalk will be used by Sarah Lawrence College for professional development of student teachers. But most charter schools have received little, if any, outside help.

The Integrated Day Charter School in Norwich got a $25,000 grant, but had to go out of state for it. The Kids Consortium, a foundation based in Maine, gave the money to start a program in which students plan and perform their own community service projects.

With 220 students, Integrated Day is one of the state's largest charter schools. Most of the schools have fewer than 100. Joan Heffernan, its director, said the schools are kept deliberately small because educational research and practical experience have shown that students in smaller schools are more highly motivated than those in larger schools.

In addition, one of the purposes of charter schools is to serve as a crucible for educational innovations in order to show more conventional schools which ideas work and which don't. But when Ms. Heffernan asked for assistance from some donors, she said, she was told they want to spend their money on projects that benefit larger numbers of children.

"We're all saying the same thing. We can't understand why," Ms. Heffernan said. Through the association, the schools may try a new strategy — asking for assistance as a group instead of as individual schools.

Mr. Sergi noted that the legislature authorized a 50 percent increase in charter school enrollment, a nearly 60 percent increase in per-pupil reimbursements, and a 33 percent increase in the number of schools, just from the first year to the second. Charter schools are also eligible for state-subsidized loans from the Connecticut Housing and Educational Facility Authority.

"You can't start 50 or 100 of these schools overnight," Mr. Sergi said. But nearly half of those proposed were given charters, and if the number of schools seems small compared with some other states, Connecticut's success rate will compare more favorably, he said.

Having only six months between approval of their charters and opening their doors, and operating with organizational structures that evolved as various crises were resolved, the charter schools often appeared tumultuous to their faculty members and governing boards.

For prospective students, there is still a waiting list.

Supporters of charter schools often note that changes can be made quickly, without the arduous institutional approval processes that characterize many school districts. But at Mr. Jawitz's school, when the teachers altered the class schedules twice in the first half year several parents withdrew their children. He also noted that his board has insisted that he spend less time teaching and more time administrating.

The state's Department of Education had to intercede at two charter schools where organizational problems became severe. At one, the Village Academy in New Haven, the entire faculty left at the end of the first year as a result of a contract dispute, and the state found that its accounting procedures and financial oversight controls were in disarray.

State officials ordered that its governing board take a more active role in the school's operation. "They were playing an advisory role rather than a governing role," said Jennifer Niles, the Department of Education's charter school program manager. Nevertheless, Ms. Niles said, two-thirds of the students returned.

There were also some extraordinary successes. At the Bridge Academy, a college preparatory high school in Bridgeport, every one of the 40 graduating seniors was accepted by a college.

Seventh and eighth graders at the Odyssey Community School produced videos for a community access cable channel and were asked to produce videos for the National Education Association, the Manchester Fire Department and the Manchester Chamber of Commerce.

The new schools that opened this year will presumably benefit from the experiences and struggles of their predecessors as well as from local school districts.

Jonathan Kantrowitz, an educational software developer who is a founder of the Brooklawn Academy, a middle school in Fairfield, was the president of the Bridge Academy's board and is getting assistance from its teachers and from the Fairfield public schools. The Highville Mustard Seed Charter School in Hamden is being helped by the New Haven public schools, and the Breakthrough Charter School, which has a local charter, has support from the Hartford public schools' trustees.

Like other charter schools, each of the new ones has a distinct instructional theme. The Charter Oak Preparatory Academy connects skill-based classroom learning with practical experience through community service projects for students in grades 6 to 9 from the Hartford-New Britain area. Its theme is the combination of academics, social skills and civic responsibility.

Breakthrough, with children enrolled in pre-kindergarten through sixth grade, focuses on parental involvement, an intimate instructional climate and fostering problem-solving and cooperation among students.

Highville Mustard Seed, serving pre-kindergarteners through fifth graders from Hamden and New Haven, concentrates on a global-studies curriculum, including foreign language instruction, and stresses individualized learning. Brooklawn Academy emphasizes acquiring reading, writing and research skills through projects using computers and the Internet.

Mr. Bruno, of the Center for School Change, said the key for the success of charter schools is their small size, but he said he thinks many of Connecticut's charter schools are too small. "It looks like 150 to 200 students is a size that makes a charter school self-supporting," he said. "My hope over time is that these schools, which hold the promise of reinventing public schools, will get parity with regards to resources." ■

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The New Democrat, July/August 1998

THE 12 LABORS OF CHARTER SCHOOLS

Will the Movement Ever End Up at the Center of School Reform?

By Chester E. Finn Jr. and Bruno V. Manno

The charter school movement continues to grow apace, judging from the waiting lists at most of today's 800 such schools, the rapidity with which new schools are being opened, and the eagerness of many (though certainly not all) states to pass some form of enabling legislation. Yet it remains a sideshow, a mere blip on the education reform radar screen. Today, charter schools educate fewer than one-half of 1 percent of U.S. schoolchildren. They can be thought of as specialty shops or boutiques, catering principally to "square peg" kids who do not fit comfortably into the round holes of conventional schools: disabled pupils, boys and girls in trouble with the law, dropouts, and others who had difficulty thriving in regular schools.

It's well and good that charters are enrolling more than their share of youngsters in urgent need of alternatives. But what about the millions of "ordinary" families whose children are not being well educated by the "ordinary" schools? Will charter schools become a major alternative for them, too?

The central question for the charter movement is whether these schools will continue in the boutique mode or whether they will become as ubiquitous as convenience stores and shopping malls — bona fide options for lots and lots of American children.

Our crystal ball is no clearer than anyone else's, but we have identified a dozen issues that we believe will shape the answer to that fundamental question.

12 Unanswered Questions

♦ First and foremost, how compelling is the evidence that charter schools provide superior education? If and when it becomes clear that charter schools yield better student achievement, we can be confident that many more people will flock to them — and that many more policymakers will screw up the courage to encourage those schools to proliferate. It's premature to expect anything more than preliminary indications of charter schools' academic results, and the early returns from most states are promising. But they are far from definitive.

♦ Second, how copious is the supply of zealous, tireless people willing to endure the tribulations of starting and sustaining a charter school? We know there are hundreds of them, but are there tens of thousands? Conversely, on the demand side, how widespread is the appetite for charters? How many Americans really want different schools for their children? This is unknowable today, not least because most families have never before been invited to ask themselves this question. It has never occurred to them that they have the right to choose or that schools might be distinctive enough to be worth the effort of making a choice.

♦ A third, related question is whether the barriers to opening charter schools can be reduced or eliminated. Today, it's risky, costly, and exceedingly difficult to bring one into being. There's the difficulty of finding a facility to house the school and the absence in most states of capital funds. Then there's less-than-full per-pupil revenues that plague many state charter programs, and the unwaived regulations, especially those governing personnel. These barriers are constructed by political foes of charters who want to keep the schools as few and as weak as possible. Will those opponents come to accept the inevitability of charter schools, or will they redouble their efforts as they see this movement taking hold?

♦ Fourth, what are charter schools, institutionally speaking? Little units of government akin to miniature school systems? Private vendors that contract with public authorities to educate youngsters? Or a hybrid, a manifestation of civil society with attributes of both the public and private sectors?

This point may sound abstract, but innumerable practical implications follow. If charter schools are miniature school districts, they are legitimately bound to follow government procurement and accounting procedures (but should, in exchange, get full public funding). If they're private vendors, however, they don't have to function like government units and need not be paid the same amount as conventional public schools (if they're willing to undertake the work at a lower price). If they're manifestations of civil society, it's yet another story. Today, the institutional status of charter schools in most states is ambiguous at best. As long as it stays that way, they're apt to remain few and far between.

♦ Fifth, are charter schools temporary or permanent? Should such a school, once created, last forever so long as it keeps getting its charter renewed? Or is it a specific response to a particular need that may pass or be met in a few years? Is a charter school more like a planet or a shooting star, a stone building or a pup tent? What, in particular, happens when a school's founders grow weary and move on? Will a different sort of school be needed to serve the next group? Will this school evolve in new directions?

We aren't accustomed to thinking of schools as temporary entities that may beg to be disposed of or recycled after a time. But perhaps charters will cause us to consider that possibility. This may be more true for "mom and pop" schools founded and led by a few fired-up individuals than for "franchise" operations that run several dozen schools in various places. Will the former tend to vanish while the latter endure? If so, the charter movement could evolve from a cornucopia of chef-owned restaurants into a chain of Pizza Huts.

◆ Sixth, can charter schools avoid re-regulation? If forced into conformity with conventional schools, they'll lose their *raison d'être*. Freedom in return for results is the charter deal. Yet there is ample evidence that the education system balks at giving schools real freedom and that, even in places where charters have wrested quite a lot of it, the danger of re-regulation is omnipresent. This danger arises from four sources:

Bureaucratic creep. Every regulatory unit — from the federal government's civil rights enforcers to a lowly district building inspector — naturally tends to assert control over everything that moves, including things that exist precisely in order "to do things differently."

Teachers unions. It's already clear from the positions of the soon-to-merge teachers unions that their professed support for charter schools is conditioned on key restrictions, particularly in staffing. These false friends of charter schools want above all to tame or discourage them, not foster them.

Interest groups. Most rules under which conventional schools labor arose in response to pressures from special interests: parents of disabled children, advocates of whole-language reading, arts lovers, physical fitness fanatics, colleges of education, and many more. They're not about to rein in their passions just because a school carries the charter label. If they can subject it to their particular enthusiasm, they will surely do so.

Scandals. Anything that goes wrong in any charter school anywhere in the land leads someone somewhere to say "we must develop new procedures and safeguards to ensure that such a thing never happens again." Occasionally that's warranted. Most of the time, however, this response amounts to killing a fly with a cannon. And gradually, inexorably, the regulations and procedures accumulate.

◆ Seventh, is accountability a ticking bomb for charter schools? Besides test scores, charter schools are legitimately held accountable for responsibly looking after the youngsters in their care; for prudently spending public dollars; and for complying with whatever laws and regulations have not been waived. Yet many of the essential gauges of accountability remain to be developed. We've heard lots of pious promises in charter applications about new assessments to be created by the schools, to be carefully calibrated to each school's particular mission, and said to be sounder than standardized tests. But we've seen few instruments so far.

For their part, few states have devised intelligent, workable, flexible charter school accountability systems. These shortcomings are exacerbated by the inadequacies of most statewide standards and tests — an issue that transcends the charter movement.

◆ Eighth, will charter enemies accumulate allies faster than charter friends? Obvious foes, of course, include teachers unions, school board associations, and colleges of education. But the list is really far longer. What about issuers of public bonds resentful of charters horning in on their sources of capital? Private schools that lose students to these no-tuition competitors? Advocacy groups fretful that charters are doing things differently? Conservatives convinced that any reform short of vouchers will only slow the needed revolution?

How should we view "regular" schools and school systems that decide to compete with charter schools by adopting programs and services aimed at the same customers? This development is bound to leave reformers with mixed feelings. After all, such market-driven responses by "the system" to the demise of its monopoly are precisely what many people hope will happen as a consequence of charter schools. Surely it's a positive development for American education. But it may be bad for charter schools themselves.

◆ Ninth, will charter schools garner broad support from individuals other than those who found, work in, and patronize them? For example, will the typically risk-adverse philanthropic community see messy, grassroots efforts like charter schools as worthy of financial support? Will bankers see these schools as acceptable risks for loans? Will venture capitalists back individuals who want to start for-profit charter school companies? Will more than a few brave politicians be willing to take on the unions and other charter foes?

◆ Tenth, will charter schools become just another special interest? That they have "clout" is probably a good thing; it helps deter enemies. But for whose benefit do they wield it? For example, will they try to protect their market share by preventing additional charter schools from coming into being? Will they police themselves effectively or develop the repugnant habit of defending all members against criticism and punishment, no matter how venal or ineffectual some might be? We've seen some disquieting signs in state capitols. More than one legislator well-disposed to charters has remarked that it didn't take long for the charter operators in his state to transform from education revolutionaries into their own interest group.

◆ Eleventh, how will the charter movement deal with other big changes now rocking K-12 education? Will it preserve itself in amber; like conventional public and private schools with their late 19th century school design and early 20th century management system? Or will it adapt to other promising reforms that are percolating in the education world? We have in mind such varied developments as distance learning, home schooling, for-profit school operators, and full-scale voucher plans. How will charters respond to the demand for schools to occupy larger portions of children's and families' lives? To the idea of residential schooling? To preschool and post-secondary options entangled with traditional K-12 schooling? And to a hundred curricular and pedagogical developments, some of them quite promising? In some charter schools that we've visited, we've heard a fair amount of grumbling that such innovations will bring confusion and grief, especially to those schools that are purposefully "traditional" in their educational orientation.

♦ Twelfth and finally, where will we find the next generation of charter school leaders? This young movement tends to raid its own membership for talent rather than growing more of it. Today there is no obvious place to go for training as a charter leader, no clear "apprenticeship" route, and no viable leadership clearinghouse. Moreover, there are early signs of burnout among charter school leaders and teachers, who work round-the-clock and usually round-the-calendar to make their schools succeed. Where will their successors come from?

A Cloudy Horizon

Surmounting these 12 challenges would place the charter idea, and the schools it inspires, at the center of the American education reform movement. That would be good for at least three reasons: Charter schools seem to provide a more congenial learning environment for kids who do not do well in conventional public schools; they offer us a glimpse of what a reinvigorated, more competitive public education system might look like; and they are an embodiment of civil society in action.

This last point is especially relevant today. Charter schools are classic Tocquevillian communities, based on shared interests and purposes. They have a clear mission and a common purpose. They are not "cafeteria" or "shopping mall" institutions that try to cater to the needs of everyone. They bring people together to work on a problem, to achieve a set of objectives, and to create a set of norms and a moral order by which those objectives can be achieved. Little of this can be said of today's typical public schools.

Moreover, charter schools restore to education a measure of local control, community involvement, and parent participation. They are manifestations of the principle that problems should be solved as close to home as possible. Creating a charter school is an exercise in citizenship: individuals rolling up their sleeves, joining together, and working side by side to improve one of the most fundamental institutions in every community — the school. Charter schools have the potential to revivify our democracy, neighborhood by neighborhood, community by community. These schools are, to borrow from Peter Drucker, "not the collectivism of organized governmental action from above ... [but] the collectivism of voluntary group action from below."

But as much as we wish otherwise, we see little evidence that the charter movement is likely to end up at the center of the education reform movement. The more likely scenario is that it will continue growing slowly but not drive the reinvention of U.S. public education. Three reasons lead us to suspect that this slower scenario may prevail.

First, politically speaking, charter schools have not attained a critical mass (though they're beginning to in one or two states). That means they lack the clout to beat back their enemies, reduce the barriers to entry, obtain the capital dollars, and secure their statutory base.

Second, the re-regulatory creep is visible at every level of government. States are "cracking down" on for-profit firms, demanding competitive "bids" on charter contracts, and otherwise trying to shove charter schools into the usual pigeonholes. Federal civil rights enforcers, evidently less enamored than President Clinton with the "differentness" of charter schools, are trying to coerce them into handling "special education" in the same way the regular schools do. (Never mind that the parents of many disabled youngsters seek out charters precisely because they do not follow those procedures and use those labels.) Local government agencies of every description are fussing about the idiosyncrasies of these "public schools that don't behave like public schools."

Finally, accountability is becoming an acute problem. As best we can tell, only Massachusetts has implemented a solid accountability plan for charter schools. Promising strategies are now arising in Colorado and the District of Columbia. If they are successful and inspire other states and charter authorizers to take this issue seriously, much good is apt to follow — as well as some bullet-biting by unsatisfactory schools. If accountability is not taken seriously, however, the charter school idea will find itself on the list of once-promising reforms that didn't amount to much.

The mindless approach to accountability via mandates and regulations will prove as fatal to the charter idea as the absence of accountability. Do we have the imagination to devise workable strategies that truly differ from conventional "compliance" methods? That may be the toughest challenge of all for those who would reinvigorate civil society and reinvent public education. ♦

Chester E. Finn Jr. is president of the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation and John M. Olin Fellow in the Washington office of the Hudson Institute. Bruno V. Manno is a senior fellow with the Hudson Institute. Both have been involved in a two-year national study of U.S. charter schools (see "The Empire Strikes Back," TND, November/December 1996). The views expressed in this article do not necessarily represent the position of the Hudson Institute.

Goldwater Institute Report

Race Discrimination in Arizona:

It's happening, just not where you think it's happening

By Jeffry Flake

A poor Hispanic child with more dreams than money stands outside the classroom, his face pressed against the glass, watching his well-heeled white colleagues discuss where their college prep classes will take them. He'd like to get in, but the school won't let him because he's the wrong color.

Sound far-fetched? It isn't. In fact, this scene might be played out in a number of locations in Arizona this year. Given recent press coverage, you might think that it's happening in Arizona's charter schools. It isn't. In fact, any charter school that refuses enrollment based on race will have its charter yanked faster than you can say Goldberg & Osborne. No, this type of race discrimination is happening in our traditional district schools. Ironically, it's called "desegregation."

The Phoenix Union High School District (PUHSD) operates 14 magnet programs. If you like airplanes, you might want to try the "Center for Aerospace Education." If you've worn out your Little Mermaid video, you might want to check out the "Center for Marine Science." If you'd rather ride a horse than go to school, chances are you can do both at the "Center for Agribusiness and Equine Science."

Of course, if you want to be assured entrance into any of these programs, it helps to be talented in your area of interest. Some of these magnets have entrance exams. It helps even more, however, to be white. You see, these programs are designed to give white kids living in the district a reason to stay in PUHSD, and to bolster the district's white count by luring kids of the desired color from outside the district.

This type of sanctioned race discrimination is galling on several counts. First, there is the explicit notion that if you are not white, the only way you can receive a good education is to sit next to a white child. Believe it or not, this sentiment still has adherents in high places. ASU Professor Gene Glass recently told the Arizona Republic: "The only hope for marginalized students is to hold a middle-class white kid hostage in that classroom. Then all the political and economic power of the parent will be brought to bear to make sure that the class has good materials." I guess they don't call universities ivory towers for nothing.

Second, if it isn't insulting enough to be told that you have to sit next to a white child in order to be properly educated, consider the following: If you are a black or Hispanic parent living within PUHSD, your locally assessed district taxes are being used to lure white kids into programs at your local school which, unless the quota gods happen to be smiling on you, your own children cannot attend. Talk about adding insult to injury! And we're not talking peanuts or federal dollars here. Over the past 10 years, local taxpayers in PUHSD have coughed up approximately $250 million dollars to run these magnet programs.

Believe it or not, it gets even sillier. Consider this hypothetical example: David and Frank are freshmen attending Mountain Pointe High School in Ahwatukee, outside the boundaries of PUHSD. Both are straight-A students and both are involved in the community. Both like drama. In fact, both like drama so much that they would like to enroll in the "Performing Arts" magnet school at PUHSD's South Mountain High School. There's only one problem: David is white and Frank is black, and there are already "too many" blacks at South Mountain. It is likely that David will not have a problem getting in because he is white. It is also likely that Frank won't get in because he is black. You see, in the Orwellian world of desegregation orders, the black students at South Mountain will gain more educationally by sitting next to David than they will by sitting next to Frank.

I wondered how PUHSD pitched their magnet programs to out of district students, so I called the district and asked if my child would have any problem getting into the "international baccalaureate" program. "No problem," I was told. "In fact, the only way you might have a problem getting in is if you are a minority."

Just as PUHSD controls which students come in, they control which students go out. If, for example, you want to attend a charter school but happen to live within a PUHSD school boundary that "needs" your particular ethnicity, tough luck. To be fair, there is one method of escape at PUHSD that seems to be race-neutral, although it is quite painful. Just let your grades slip to unacceptable levels. If you do, PUHSD has a policy that allows you out, regardless of your race. Sadly, it seems that the only way to be judged by the content of your character at PUHSD is to be of low academic character.

You might be wondering how PUHSD officials defend the indefensible. It's easy. They blame the courts. "We know this all looks pretty silly", they might say, "but we're under this darn desegregation order, and, well, there's just not anything we can do about it." Sounds plausible, until you realize that federal courts actually lifted the order two years ago. It was PUHSD (the defendant in the original desegregation suit) who rushed to the judge and begged not to be thrown out of the brier patch. The court relented, and the desegregation order still stands. The real issue, of course, is money. The desegregation order allows PUHSD to levy a desegregation tax without voter approval. With desegregation expenditures accounting for one-quarter of PUHSD's budget, the district is not about to kill this goose.

So, next time you hear that some schools in Arizona practice race discrimination, believe it. It's just not happening where you think it's happening.

Jeffry Flake is executive director of the Goldwater Institute.

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Selected Readings on School Reform

School Choice—And Choices

With the Wisconsin Supreme Court's historic decision in the Milwaukee voucher case, and the creation of the $100 million Children's Scholarship Fund, this summer witnessed major progress for the school choice movement. Meanwhile, the dog days of July and August recorded a much subtler but determinedly positive trend in the same direction, highlights of which are reported herein.

In his article "Expansion of Choice Program Gets Under Way," Joe Williams of the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* reports that, due largely to the court decision, 6,000 students will take advantage of vouchers in Milwaukee this year.

Not only conservatives are celebrating this development. Nina Shokraii Rees, in her Heritage *Backgrounder*, "What People Are Saying About School Choice," identifies the swelling chorus of liberal voices in favor of school vouchers.

Next, we serve up several stories chronicling the success of alternative education providers. First, Anne Marie O'Connor of *The Los Angeles Times* reports in her article, "Many Latinos Fare Better in Catholic Schools," that Catholic schools are offering many Latino families a safer, more successful alternative than their public counterparts. This is especially important since the Catholic schools now educate 42,500 Hispanic children in Los Angeles alone.

On the other coast, *The Washington Post*'s Kirstin Downey Grimsley ("At Work Site Schools, Kids Learn While Parents Earn") explores the advent of schools located at parents' places of work. These schools are typically "satellites" of the local school district and provide a convenient option for parents and one that public school administrators also find favor with. (Often the employer pays for the facility!)

Finally, in *The New York Times Magazine*, Alex Kotlowitz, in "The High School at the End of the Road," describes Eagle Rock High School, a private facility funded by Honda and designed to turn troubled teens into successful adults. Perched on a 650 acre lot in the Rocky Mountains, the school spends nearly $25,000 per student. Looks like money well spent, as it appears to be providing lost youngsters with a strong moral compass.

JRP

Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, August 27, 1998

Expansion of choice program gets under way
Religious schools join; 6,000 students expected

By Joe Williams

On a morning when 103,000 city youngsters returned to classes in Milwaukee Public Schools, Theresa Battles and her 16-year-old daughter could only smile Wednesday about their small part in education history. A recent state Supreme Court decision allowing families to use publicly financed vouchers to send children to religious schools helped Battles make the decision to end a brief stint living in Tennessee. "I prayed and the good Lord answered," said Battles, who was helping her daughter find her new locker at Messmer High School, a Catholic school on the north side.

"I knew choice was going to be the only way. The public schools were not going to work out. I worked too hard to raise my children and have everything go down the drain."

Her daughter, Britanya Smith, is one of thousands of Milwaukee students attending religious schools through the expanded choice program. Battles, a single parent who works as a J.C. Penney outlet store cashier, has two other children enrolled in Catholic schools thanks to choice.

Milwaukee and Cleveland are the only two cities in the nation that offer such a program, but the Cleveland program still has not been found to be constitutional. The Wisconsin Supreme Court ruled this summer that Milwaukee's school choice program did not violate portions of the U.S. Constitution calling for the separation of church and state. State officials estimate that about 6,000 students will use vouchers to attend about 86 private schools this year. Many will be used at religious schools. State law allows for up to 15,000 vouchers for poor city residents.

"I wouldn't have it any other way," said Battles, who attended registration day at Messmer on Wednesday. Some schools that are accepting vouchers are already open for classes; others do not start until next week.

Before moving to Tennessee, her daughter attended Whitefish Bay High School through the Chapter 220 program. This time, her mother said, she wanted the girl to be educated in a religious environment. "The big word speaks for itself: choice. A parent should have the right to choose where their children go to school," Battles said. The start of the expanded school choice program prompted a news conference at the north side offices of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

"We want to make sure that the implementation of the program doesn't create more problems than the program itself is supposed to solve," said Chris Ahmuty, executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union's Milwaukee office.

The NAACP, ACLU and other groups gathered to criticize schools in the program for not signing a non-discrimination pledge mailed to participating schools by Ahmuty.

"The mentality of Milwaukee on charter, choice and vouchers is best described as people arguing over whether they should be given aspirin or Tylenol to a person stricken with stage two carcinoma," said the Rev. Rolen Womack, who said none of the current discussions on education reform gets at the real problems in the city's education system. Speaking as a member of the Milwaukee Ministerial Alliance and the People for the American Way, Womack said the money being spent on vouchers could be better spent reducing class sizes and modernizing school facilities.

While the novelty of the expanded school choice program was exciting for those in participating schools, parents and students at many of the city's public schools were just as eager to return to class Wednesday. "He has been ready for a week," said Tamira Lee, who walked her son to school at Palmer Elementary School, 1900 N. 1st St. Palmer, one of more than a dozen schools to begin this year with a new principal, welcomed its students back with colored pennants hung outside the school's entrance.

"We had a wonderful day," Palmer Assistant Principal Kevin Walsh said. "In a lot of cases, the first day of school will not be a full house, but we were about at capacity."

For Superintendent Alan Brown, Wednesday marked his first back-to-school day as the head of the state's largest school system. "I am probably more excited about the start of a new school year this year than many of our students are," said Brown, who marked the day by visiting Vincent High School, Auer Avenue Elementary School and Bell Middle School. "I want everyone to know this year all the resources of this district will be focused on improving student achievement in our classrooms." Brown said he intends to visit many classrooms this year to discuss the challenges facing education in the city and to see the work teachers are doing.

The Heritage Foundation
Backgrounder

No. 1188 June 2, 1998

WHAT PEOPLE ARE SAYING ABOUT SCHOOL CHOICE

NINA H. SHOKRAII[1]

President Bill Clinton recently vetoed S. 1502, the D.C. Student Opportunity Scholarship Act of 1998 passed by Congress on April 30, 1998. This $7 million plan would have offered 2,000 District of Columbia students vouchers worth up to $3,200 to help them attend a public, private, or religious school of choice.

Critics claimed that parents in the District did not support these scholarships. For example, Senator Edward M. Kennedy (D–MA) asserted that "D.C. parents and ministers and local leaders have made it clear that they do not want vouchers."[2] Senator Thomas Daschle (D–SD) observed that "All parents want their children to be able to go to the best schools possible. But . . . District voters rejected vouchers by an 8-to-1 margin in 1981."[3] And Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton (D–DC) stated, "I think I can say with confidence that the people I represent would deeply resent the imposition of vouchers."[4]

This rhetoric, however, ignores the reality of growing bipartisan and grassroots support for vouchers. Three days after the President's veto, for example, *The Washington Post* released the results of a May 11–17, 1998, poll of District residents on this issue. Contrary to the claims of critics, the poll showed that 65 percent of African-Americans who reside in the District and have incomes under $50,000 favor using federal dollars to send children to private or religious schools. Furthermore, 56 percent of D.C.

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[1] The author would like to thank Jake Phillips, a 1998 summer intern at The Heritage Foundation and senior at Duke University, for his assistance with this paper.

[2] "District of Columbia Student Opportunity Scholarship Act of 1997," *Congressional Record*, September 25, 1997, p. S9930.

[3] "District of Columbia Student Opportunity Scholarship Act of 1997," *Congressional Record*, September 30, 1997, p. S10193.

[4] "District of Columbia Student Opportunity Scholarship Act of 1997," *Congressional Record*, October 9, 1997, p. H8801.

residents overall support school choice.[5] Contrary to what critics have said, school choice is popular.

Congress should consider adopting choice to help District of Columbia students, whether this involves overriding the President's veto of the D.C. Student Opportunity Scholarship Act or working through some other legislative vehicle. Residents of the District, particularly low-income parents who would be eligible for such scholarships, are solidly behind vouchers, and they deserve an opportunity to send their children to schools that are most likely to help them succeed.

School choice and vouchers have attracted strong support among legislators and members of the President's own party, as well as among independent journalists, as the following quotes clearly demonstrate.

Senator Joseph R. Biden, Jr. (D–DE):

> I have come to the belief that the constitutional issues involved [with school choice] are not as clear cut as opponents have argued. While lower courts have ruled that vouchers used in private religious schools violate the first amendment's prohibition on the establishment of religion, the Supreme Court has not yet weighed in on the question. In fact, the Supreme Court has ruled that State tuition tax credits for private religious school tuition are perfectly constitutional, and the Supreme Court has ruled that Pell grants—vouchers for college students—can be used in private religious colleges without violating the Constitution. . . . Even some liberal constitutional scholars have noted that vouchers to parents and children may be constitutional.
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> Even if vouchers were to take money away from the public schools—and I should point out that not all voucher proposals do—that does not in and of itself mean that public schools will be harmed.
>
> When you have an area of the country—and most often here we are talking about inner cities—where the public schools are abysmal or dysfunctional or not working and where most of the children have no way out, it is legitimate to ask what would happen to the public schools with increased competition from private schools and what would happen to the quality of education for the children who live there.[6]

Matthew Cooper, in *Newsweek*:

> For [Senator John] Kerry [D-MA], the debate over schools has become mindless Kabuki ritual: while liberals want more money for public education and conservatives demand private-school vouchers, kids fall farther behind. . . . This spring, Kerry plans to commit the supreme Democratic heresy. He's considering, NEWSWEEK has learned, embracing school vouchers if conservatives do their part and back vastly increased resources for public education.[7]

Former Representative Floyd Flake (D–NY):

> This is not a question for me about Democrats or Republicans. It is really a question about whether or not we are going to continue to let every child die, arguing that, if we begin to do vouchers, if we do charter schools, what we in fact are doing is taking away from the public system. We say, let them all stay there. Let them all die. It is like saying there has been a plane crash. But because we cannot save every child,

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[5] Sari Horwitz, "Poll Finds Backing for D.C. School Vouchers: Blacks Support Idea More Than Whites," *The Washington Post*, May 24, 1998, pp. F1, F7.

[6] "District of Columbia Appropriations Act," *Congressional Record*, September 30, 1997, p. S10192.

[7] Matthew Cooper, "The New Choirboys," *Newsweek*, May 4, 1998, p. 29.

NOTE: Nothing written here is to be construed as necessarily reflecting the views of The Heritage Foundation or as an attempt to aid or hinder the passage of any bill before Congress.

> we are not going to save any of our children; we let them all die.[8]

Senator J. Robert Kerrey (D–NE):

> "If I were running a public school system, I'd sign a contract with the parochial schools—as Mayor Guiliani wanted to do in New York—and have them educate some of the poorest kids," [Senator Kerrey] told *New Yorker* magazine. "I don't see the First Amendment as so rigid that it prevents us from contracting with people who are getting the job done right."[9]

Alveda C. King, niece of Dr. Martin Luther King and senior fellow at the Alexis de Tocqueville Institution in Washington, D.C., in *The Wall Street Journal*:

> The District of Columbia public school system allocates $10,180 per student, the highest in the nation, according to the U.S. Department of Education. Yet, according to the Annie Casey Foundation, 80% of fourth-graders in the Washington public schools score below their grade on basic math skills. The National Assessment of Education Progress reports that 72% of Washington's fourth-graders test below "basic proficiency" . . . [an] appalling failure. . . .
>
> Washington's families and teachers favor a right to choose the paths of education for their families. . . . The issue is not what families choose, but rather, that they be allowed and empowered to do so.
>
> U.S. citizenship guarantees all parents an education for their children. This is a true civil right. Yet some children receive a better education than others due to their parents' abilities to pay for benefits that are often missing in public schools. This inequity is a violation of the civil rights of the parents and children who are so afflicted by lack of income and by the mismanagement endemic to so many of the country's public school systems.[10]

Senator Joseph I. Lieberman (D–CT):

> The true choice here is between preserving the status quo at all costs, which is slamming a door in the face of the parents and children who want to do better, and doing what is necessary to put those children first. In other words, asking whether the status quo of the public education orthodoxy, which is letting down so many children, is so important that we are willing to sacrifice the hopes and aspirations of thousands of children for the sake of a process, not for the sake of the children.[11]

Representative James P. Moran, Jr. (D–VA):

> I am going to . . . plead with my colleagues on the Democratic side, where the opposition to the bill lies, to set aside the suspect political motivation behind [the Student Opportunity Scholarship Act] and to put aside all that kind of lofty ideological rhetoric that partisanship can inspire. . . . Because all it is is an additional $7 million that can only go to poor families, only poor families. . . . Why should we condemn all of these children to continue to suffer such inequity because we want to uphold our lofty principles and our traditional politics? Of course we believe in public schools. But we also believe in the intrinsic worth of every one of those children born in the District of Columbia. They have the same right as everyone else has.[12]

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[8] Floyd Flake, floor speech in support of low-income scholarships and charter schools, U.S. House of Representatives, 105th Cong., October 31, 1997.

[9] Matthew Robinson, "Is Left Warming to Vouchers?" *Investor's Business Daily*, March 2, 1998, p. A1.

[10] Alveda C. King, "Fighting for School Choice: It's a Civil Right," *The Wall Street Journal*, September 11, 1997.

[11] "District of Columbia Appropriations Act, 1998," *Congressional Record*, September 30, 1997, p. S10195.

William Raspberry, columnist for *The Washington Post*:

> Look at it from the viewpoint of those parents who grab so avidly for the chance to get their children into better schools: Should they be required to keep their children in dreadful schools in order to keep those schools from growing even worse? Should they be made to wait until we get around to improving all the public schools? . . . Surely voucher opponents cannot believe the logic of their counterargument: that if you can't save everybody—whether from a burning apartment house, a sinking ship or a dreadful school system—it's better not to save anybody at all.[13]

Jonathan Rauch, national correspondent for *The National Journal*, in *The New Republic*:

> I've always found it a little odd that liberals hand the voucher idea to Republicans like [Representatives Charles H.] Taylor and [House Speaker] Newt Gingrich, rather than grabbing if for themselves. . . . For poor children, trapped in execrable schools, the case [for vouchers] is moral rather than merely educational. These kids attend schools which cannot protect their physical safety, much less teach them. To require poor people to go to dangerous, dysfunctional schools that better-off people fled years ago, and that better-off people would never tolerate for their own children—all the while intoning pieties about "saving" public education—is worse than unsound public policy. It is repugnant public policy.
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> Why should the poor be denied more control over their most important means of social advancement, when soccer moms and latte-drinkers take for granted that they can buy their way out of a school (or a school district) that abuses or annoys them?
>
> By embracing school choice—if not everywhere, then at least somewhere—liberals could at one stroke emancipate the District's schoolchildren while also emancipating liberalism from that basest sort of corruption.[14]

Diane Ravitch, Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institution, and William A. Galston, Professor at the University of Maryland School of Public Affairs, in *The Washington Post*:

> These [school choice] efforts should be expanded into a national demonstration program involving poor children in no fewer than 10 hard-pressed urban school districts for a period of no less than five years, with carefully designed monitoring and evaluation plans. We cannot afford to write off another generation of urban schoolchildren. . . . It is time to set ideology and politics aside and put our children first.[15]

Brent Staples, editorial board of *The New York Times*:

> Democrats who had made careers as champions of the poor opposed the [school choice] plan, arguing that a solution that did not save every child was unacceptable. The Democrats got the worst of the exchange. They seemed more interested in preserving the public school monopoly than in saving at least some children's lives [through vouchers].[16]

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[12] "District of Columbia Student Opportunity Scholarship Act of 1997," *Congressional Record*, April 30, 1998, p. H26655.

[13] William Raspberry, "Not Enough Lifeboats," *The Washington Post*, March 9, 1998, p. A19.

[14] Jonathan Rauch, "TRB from Washington: Choose or Lose," *The New Republic*, November 10, 1997.

[15] Diane Ravitch and William Galston, "Scholarships for Inner-City School Kids," *The Washington Post*, December 17, 1996, p. A23.

Virginia Walden, D.C. parent, in *The Washington Post*:

> I am a lifelong Democrat, and I am not sure when the Democrats decided that siding with the poor and the needy is no longer part of their platform. School choice empowers parents, and I don't care who is behind it, Democrats or Republicans.[17]

Editorial, *The Washington Post*:

> A modest voucher experiment might help energize the public schools. . . . And such a program, we believe, will not do harm to the system or by implication suggest that it is a permanent loser. . . . The point—the hope—would be that such an experiment could be one small part of the effort being undertaken with vigor and optimism by the new school team to bring the District system to a higher, more even standard of achievement, one that reflects the quality of our best schools, which are the models.[18]

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[16] Brent Staples, "Schoolyard Brawl," *The New York Times*, January 4, 1998, Section 4A, p. 35.

[17] Virginia Walden, "Vouchers Deserved a Chance," *The Washington Post*, May 24, 1998, p. C8. Virginia Walden is a single mother of three children in the District of Columbia.

[18] Editorial, "The Voucher Issue," *The Washington Post*, September 30, 1997, p. A20.

Los Angeles Times, August 3, 1998

MANY LATINOS FARE BETTER IN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

By ANNE-MARIE O'CONNOR, TIMES STAFF WRITER

Mexican-born mother Marta Lopez feared that if she left her three U.S.-born children in public schools, they would end up like her—in a Boyle Heights housing project surrounded by gangs and drug dealers.

A gang clique was laying after-school ambushes for Yolanda, 13. Lopez's sixth-grader, Sylvia, still spoke no English. Older boys were beating up Roberto, 6, her Spanish-speaking first-grader.

In January, she persuaded the city's poorest Catholic school, Dolores Mission, to take all three. Soon, Yolanda was safe, Sylvia was grappling with English and Roberto was considered one of the brightest children in his class—though Catholic schools have no formal bilingual education program. As wealthy California parents put their children in suburban private schools, low-income immigrants from Latin America and Asia have turned to inner-city Catholic schools where a host of national studies say disadvantaged black and Latino students are outperforming their public school counterparts.

At a time when nearly three in 10 Latinos are not finishing high school, 97.4% of California Catholic school graduates go on to two- or four-year colleges, Catholic school figures show. A large number of those are Latinos, considering that 29% of California's 251,478 Catholic schoolchildren are Latino.

"Given the right opportunity, low-income kids—regardless of whether they are Latino or African American—can live up to their potential," said Harry Pachon, president of the Tomas Rivera Policy Institute, a Latino think tank. "Catholic schools, through a combination of factors, are providing those opportunities."

In Los Angeles, Latino enrollment in Catholic schools has grown more slowly than in public schools, but inner-city Catholic schools' performance appears to surpass that of public education, experts say.

Latino Catholic school enrollment has jumped 60% in the Los Angeles archdiocese since 1970. Today, 46% of the county's 92,500 Catholic schoolchildren are Latino. The influx has helped buoy state Catholic schools to their highest enrollment since 1965, said California Catholic schools superintendent Robert Teegarden.

Some Latino students are from the emerging middle class. But in Los Angeles, many are from poor immigrant families who are among the recipients of $ 11 million in financial aid. Some inner-city students, especially in the lower grades, enroll speaking only Spanish or limited English.

"We have a much higher number of immigrant and low-income students than other Catholic schools around the country, and we seem to be getting the same achievement results," said Jerome Porath, superintendent of the Los Angeles archdiocese's Catholic schools.

At Sacred Heart High School, a Lincoln Heights academy that taught Irish immigrant children 100 years ago, 90% of the 275 students are Latinas from inner-city Boyle Heights, South Central and East Los Angeles, according to school administrator Kathy Young. The tuition is $ 3,500 a year, but one-third receives scholarships. Ninety-five percent of seniors go on to college, the average for city Catholic high schools. Graduates have gone to Princeton, Harvard and Stanford; some have become doctors and lawyers.

Less than 1% of Catholic high school students drop out, often to return to public schools, administrators say. By contrast, in the Los Angeles Unified School District, which is 68.5% Latino, just over half of all graduates say they are going to college. In 1996-97, 7.8% of the 111,262 Latino high school students dropped out, said Donna Rothenbaum, of the state Department of Education.

Still, the Los Angeles teachers union says it is wrong to compare public and Catholic schools. Catholic schools can easily expel drug users, gang members, and disruptive students. They do not take severely handicapped children. They benefit from the "self-selection" effect of parents committed enough to send their children to private schools.

Many public school teachers would like to adopt some of those features—though not the notoriously low-pay scale of Catholic teachers, who earn an average of $ 21,882 annually—said Steve Blazak, spokesman of the teachers union, United Teachers-Los Angeles. "What they're doing corresponds to some of the things we're pushing for—safe schools, parental involvement and a district-wide discipline code with teeth," Blazak said. "We would like to have the same high standards."

Students Receive More Attention

Experts began studying inner-city Catholic schools in the 1980s because, unlike the private schools of affluent suburban children, they were a much closer mirror of urban public schools. In California, about 55% of the Catholic schoolchildren are now minorities. In the three-county Los Angeles archdiocese, 69% of the 70,000 elementary students and 62.5% of the 30,000 high school students are Latinos, blacks, or Asians.

"A lot of people call Catholic schools the poor man's private school," said Valerie Lee, an education expert at the University of Michigan and co-author of a book, "Catholic Schools and the Common Good".
"They're safe and well-cared for by teachers who demand a lot of them, they go on to college and don't drop out much," she said. "And they're surrounded by inner-city public schools where all the bad things are endemic."

Lee's study of minority students at Catholic schools, published in 1993, found that the schools dramatically reduced the academic handicaps imposed by a disadvantaged background. Other studies in Chicago and New York found higher SAT and graduation rates.

Paul Hill, co-author of a 1990 Rand study of New York Catholic schools, does not accept the contention that they were succeeding because parents at those schools were more committed than public school parents. "There are a lot of parents in public schools willing to try anything possible, who are desperate about the low quality and feel their children are being hurt by public schools," Hill said. "The only intelligent conclusion is that Catholic schools may be doing better."

One important difference, experts say, may be the relative absence at Catholic schools of tracking, which studies say often shortchange black and Latino students. All Catholic high school students are on a college preparatory track. "From time to time people say, 'You should offer technical training because not everybody is college material,' " Porath said. "I say, 'Why not give them a chance?' "

Others point to structural problems at inner-city public schools, where high school counselors handle as many as 400 students and have little time to plan students' course loads or college applications. At Catholic high schools, coaching seniors into college is a top goal.

But the most important values behind their success, experts say, are the adherence to a core curriculum, an insistence on old-fashioned character-building, civility and ethics; and the commitment to offering the community emotional backing and identity many disadvantaged children lack—even if it means acting as surrogate parents.

Dan Horn is the principal of St. Thomas, an award-winning Catholic K-8 in a Pico Union area that is the Ellis Island for Central American immigrants. Three years after he took over, a woman who had been shot to death was dumped in the driveway. Gang gunfights are less common in the district, but the school still holds drive-by shooting drills. Horn calls his students "the good gang," acknowledging the hunger to belong that leaves local children—many left alone by parents working several jobs to support them—highly vulnerable to gangs and teenage pregnancy.

All but 11 of his 315 students are there on need-based scholarships, some granted so informally no paperwork was involved. Their parents are maids, factory workers, and can collectors. Some pay nothing. Having 10 families that paid full tuition last year--$ 2,075--was "a major achievement," Horn said. "Most Catholic schools in areas like ours probably don't have anybody paying the actual cost of education. We have to go out and raise the money."

There are about 35 students per class—higher than the 20 per teacher in K-3 public schools—but St. Thomas strives to create a close-knit, family environment. Last year, when Chris Mejia's Salvadoran immigrant mother died of cancer and left him an orphan, the distressed eighth-grader rushed to school and sought his dance teacher. She became something of a second mother. With her support, Chris received a scholarship to start Catholic high school this fall.

The school's theater program counteracts the widespread attitude among disaffected local youths that it somehow isn't "cool" to get good grades and achieve in school. One St. Thomas convert was Adolfo Guevara, a onetime low-achiever. He became envious of the small-time Hollywood aura the school thespians enjoyed and sheepishly auditioned for the musical "Godspell." He was cast as Jesus, and from then on he was hooked on school.

Educators say the musicals coax untapped gifts that might have gone unnoticed for a lifetime—along with the confidence they instill. Theater also encourages parents to enroll in English adult education courses so they can understand the plays that keep their children off the streets.

At a recent Catholic educators' conference, Nancy Rosales, a shy eighth-grader with cat-eye glasses and long black hair belted out "Home" (from the Whiz) in a big voice with such range and depth, she brought tears to some eyes. The school still sometimes loses students to the streets. Two students—one on a full scholarship—got involved with gangs last year. Both were expelled.

A Laboratory for English Instruction

As Catholic schools attract the attention and interest of educators, they also provide a laboratory for language instruction, the issue that has captivated California public schools this year in the debate over bilingual education. There are no comprehensive figures, but Teegarden said many Latino and Asian immigrant children start Catholic kindergarten speaking no English.

Lessons are in English, and teachers rely on bilingual aides—and most important, he said, fellow students—to bring the students up to speed. "It's not like if you didn't get it in English, tough luck," Los Angeles Superintendent Porath said. "Teachers find ways to help the kids understand. Children, especially in the primary grades, seem to acquire the language quite readily." As many as five of the 35 incoming St. Thomas kindergartners spoke no English in the early 1990s. Most students speak Spanish at home, and the language echoes throughout the school's hallways, offices and playground.

When Roberto Lopez entered first grade at Dolores Mission in January, he spoke no English and his teacher, Rosemary Powell, spoke no Spanish. But nobody relegated the inquisitive little boy to the dummy track.

"This kid is sharp. He's one of the smartest kids in the class," Powell said. "He picks up everything really quickly." Roberto beamed from behind a "Doctor Seuss" book, pointing to an illustration of a blond hairy fantasy animal. "That's a guera," he offered in Spanglish.

At Dolores Mission, classes are in English, but students chatter away in Spanish to each other. Who speaks Spanish at home? Every child in Roberto's class raises their hand. "Except when I do my homework with my Dad," said Xochitl Davila, 6. "That's in English."

Dolores Mission covers only 20% of its annual budget with tuition. Usually, parents do not enroll their children in the first grade. Instead, they wait until a public school menace looms.

"They feel there's greater social pressure in public schools for the girls to be more active with boys, whether sexual or otherwise," said Gabrielle Porter, a bilingual aide. "And with the boys, they worry about gangs and drugs."

Recently, a mother asked the school to take an older son because he was under pressure to join a gang. And Roberto's mother, Marta Lopez, was concerned that her daughter Sylvia was not being transitioned into English by bilingual educators.

Language skills is one reason Dolores Mission principal, Sister Pat Reinhart, encourages parents to enroll children as early as possible. "The younger they learn the language, the easier it is," she said.

The school's mission does not stop at scholastics. It also targets the "poverty of the imagination." "They watch television and don't believe that prosperous lifestyle belongs to them," said Father Greg Bonfiglio, a school administrator. "We try to get them to imagine a future in which they are doctors and not asbestos removal workers."

The Washington Post, September 08, 1998

At Work-Site Schools, Kids Learn While Parents Earn

By Kirstin Downey Grimsley, Washington Post Staff Writer

It was the first day of elementary school at the NationsBank Satellite Learning Center and emotions were running high as children and parents surged into the school building. But Jared Green, who turned 5 that day, had no separation anxiety. He knew his mom would be in the office building right across the parking lot.

"He was super-calm, especially for a little kindergartner," said Lori Green, 39, a NationsBank business analyst whose son has attended the company's adjacent child care center since he was 3 years old. She pointed out, "Of course, it's not new to him."

The Green family is taking advantage of an increasingly popular corporate employee benefit sprouting up around the country -- work-site schools, also known as satellite schools. Some of the companies that introduced day-care centers for their employees' children in the early 1980s are now opening their own elementary schools, staffed with taxpayer-funded teachers. About 30 such elementary schools have opened across the nation in recent years, including the NationsBank facility, and at least 10 more are being planned.

The companies involved -- including technology firm Hewlett-Packard Co. in Santa Rosa, Calif., and retailer Target Corp. in Minneapolis -- like work-site schools because they are an attractive, cost-effective tool for recruiting and retaining employees in a tight labor market. And cash-strapped public school districts bursting at the seams like them because they reduce school system costs and relieve overcrowding.

Time-starved working parents say they gain more time with their children while commuting and lunching together. And the schools enable parents to be more involved in their children's education -- a factor that educators say is vitally important to academic performance.

"There's a tremendous amount of interest now from the employer side, but also from legislators, educators and mayors," said Mary Anne Ward, president of CorporateFamily Schools, which specializes in helping companies establish work-site schools.

Most of the work-site schools operate as public-private partnerships. The local public school system provides teachers, curricula and instructional materials, and the companies provide the school facilities (usually on land they already own), maintain them and sometimes pay for utilities. The work-site schools are paired with "host" neighborhood schools that provide administrative support and share art and music teachers. The companies typically also supply the schools with amenities, such as computers, playground equipment, audiovisual gear and refrigerators.

The biggest concentration of work-site schools is in Florida, where retirees have balked at funding school construction but where the student population continues to surge. "It's a win-win investment," said Mari White, senior vice president of work environment integration at NationsBank, who helped launch the Jacksonville school in 1991 in response to employees' fears about the quality of their children's education.

"We know it's a retention tool for us, and a great recruitment tool." NationsBank project manager Stephanie Priede, 33, for example, said she recently turned down several competing job offers at higher pay because she will not disrupt her two children's education at the Satellite Learning Center. Speaking above the shouts and squeals in the bustling hallway as she dropped off her children, Priede said the school is "the whole reason I stay at the bank."

American Bankers Insurance Group, which opened the first work-site school in Miami in 1987, estimates it saves $ 475,000 a year -- or more than three times the $ 140,000 it costs to run the school -- because it has reduced employee turnover and absenteeism. Job turnover among parents of children attending the school is 6 percent, compared with 13.3 percent at the company overall, said Linda Alvarez, the firm's director of children's services.

Another reason the schools have proven popular is that they can be built surprisingly inexpensively, particularly compared with day-care centers, which need special facilities for naps and feeding and require the operator to pay the teachers' salaries.

At a work-site school, however, portable classrooms are adequate for housing students. The school at the Radisson Twin Towers Hotel in Orlando, for example, cost the company $ 34,000 to erect, Ward said. It is basically two portable classrooms with a false front that looks like an old-fashioned little red schoolhouse, complete with white picket fence.

Orlando Regional Healthcare Systems' school, which has 60 students in kindergarten, first and second grades, cost about $ 100,000. "We felt that for a low amount of capital, the benefits would be enormous," said Dyana Burke, the hospital's home life/work life coordinator. "And they have been. It's been incredible."

The NationsBank school, on the other hand, cost more than $ 1.4 million. The company started its school in two portable buildings and then moved it into a renovated maintenance building at its corporate campus. Overlooking a pond, the lushly landscaped school, with 176 students, has a cafeteria and a media center and is surrounded by colorful playground equipment.

The NationsBank facility sharply contrasts with its host school, Beauclerc Elementary School, located about five miles away. On the first day of school at Beauclerc, construction debris littered the lot behind the school and weeds grew up along the chain-link fence that serves as the school's perimeter. In the hot, midafternoon sun, a long line of children walked out across the dusty playground to reach a single jungle gym behind the school.

Some critics have questioned whether the company schools are elitist, offering special perks to a fortunate few and leaving other schools stripped of involved parents. That was one reason some Santa Rosa residents initially opposed Hewlett-Packard's plans to build a school there.

Other critics have raised concerns about anchoring children's school lives in the shifting sands of Corporate America, where takeovers, mergers and downsizing can change the makeup of a work force almost overnight. Indeed, these have been stressful times at the NationsBank Satellite Learning Center. It was originally launched by Barnett Bank, which was taken over by NationsBank in the past year. Now NationsBank is merging with Bank of America.

NationsBank officials agreed to continue supporting the school, but as a result of the merger about 30 children have left the school in the past year after their parents lost their jobs or were forced to move because of the reorganization. "It's hard," said Meradeth McGinnis, the school's director, who watched as one by one the children learned the bad news. "They get to finish the school year, but the child is affected other ways -- financially and emotionally -- by what happens to the parents. Children bear the brunt of it."

Education expert Chester E. Finn, a fan of workplace schools and former assistant secretary of education during the Reagan administration, said students come and go at traditional schools as well. He said some urban schools lose 50 percent of their student population each year as their parents move from place to place.

"Transitory populations are not peculiar to the workplace," Finn said. "It's just that the turbulence comes from a different sources." Finn also said the schools could lack diversity in cases where work forces are very homogenous, such as within large investment firms or where they are skewed toward a low-wage work force, such as a carpet factory.

He added, however, that work-site schools could also create a more mixed group -- with janitors' children learning alongside top executives' children -- than is often assembled in public schools, where people live in neighborhoods with people of similar incomes. "Workplaces tend to be better integrated than neighborhoods," Finn said. "Maybe this is a new kind of neighborhood emerging."

Florida educators in Orange and Duval counties who have been involved with work-site schools have become big boosters of the concept. "It's been an overwhelming, unqualified success," said Judy Poppell, director of academic programs for Duval County Public Schools. One reason the educators are enthusiastic is that parents become so involved when the schools are closer to their workplaces, leading to better test scores for the children. At the NationsBank school, for example, there is 100 percent participation in the Parent-Teacher Association and parents eagerly volunteer for almost every activity.

"Everyone agrees that parental involvement is absolutely essential to a child's success," said Ward. "This way the parent is always there when the kid is dressed as a turkey for the Thanksgiving pageant. Kids get the message that school really matters, that education really matters. The parent's boss shows up, the CEO shows up, people at work who don't have kids show up. It sends a very important message to these kids."

But those who have created company schools say they present thorny management challenges because they blur long-established boundaries between private life, civic life and work life. At the Orlando hospital school, for example, parents sometimes become confused about what role the company plays at the school, said Burke. One hospital employee called Burke repeatedly, insisting she intervene on her son's behalf in a discipline dispute. Burke had to tell the employee she would not get involved in the school matter.

The schools also create management problems for educators. Polly Roper, principal of Blankner Elementary School, the host facility for the Orlando hospital school, said at first she was reluctant to take on the responsibility of launching the school because she knew it would entail so much extra work. The first teachers who worked there left because they found the small school too isolated, she said.

"You need to have extremely strong teachers," Roper said. "They have to be able to work independently." There are also many small details to negotiate, such as school lunches: At the Radisson, children eat at the employee cafeteria; at Orlando, hospital staff prepares the meals; and in Jacksonville, at the NationsBank school, a private firm caters the meals for children throughout the district.

But parents, executives and school officials said the problems and sacrifices are worth the effort. They said they can arrange school hours to mesh better with parents' work schedules, that before- and after-school care is provided and that work-site schools permit some fathers to be more involved with their children than they would otherwise be.

On a recent sunny afternoon, for example, Allan Jones, director of international business at the Orlando hospital, sat at a picnic table outside the school waiting for his 6-year-old daughter to arrive. For Jones, who treks around the globe building up the medical center's international clientele, the school's presence just a few hundred yards from his office means precious additional time with Rachel, a first-grader.

"It's important for me to have access to Rachel because of my travel demands, and the commute together gives us quality, focused father-daughter time," Jones said, keeping a sharp eye on the classroom door.

Soon the door flew open and Rachel bounded out, a huge gap-toothed grin splitting her face as she spotted her dad. They embraced and sat down together for lunch. "Not every company is able to do this," Jones said. "It takes a special corporation that is focused on the family, not just saying it, but doing it."

The New York Times Magazine, July 5, 1998

The High School at the End of the Road

Dropouts, truants and simply bored teen-agers — Eagle Rock School in Colorado provides a moral compass for kids who have lost their way, and educators nationwide are paying attention.

By Alex Kotlowitz

IN AUGUST 1996, JERRY MCGINNES, A sulking, brooding 18-year-old, awaited sentencing in a Fort Collins, Colo., courtroom. His tattoos — the sun and a cross on his forearms and unintelligible markings on his knuckles, a result of a drunken evening — lent Jerry an air of defiance. The Juvenile Court magistrate, Joseph Coyte, asked if he had anything to say. Jerry, who had dropped out of school, had been on probation for stealing a car when he cut off his ankle monitor and fled for San Diego to live with his sister. There, he smoked marijuana and hung out until deciding he'd had enough of being on the run. He then turned himself in. The prosecutor asked that the judge send him to a youth prison. Jerry rose; his hands, manacled and shaking, clutched a penciled four-page letter he had written. He read it aloud.

> Magistrate Coyte,
>
> About four months ago, I decided to move to San Diego. While I was there I was exposed to the hole [sic] drug scene for a while it was fun, but it soon got old and reality began to set in. I decided to come back and turn my self in. . . .
>
> Your Honor I'm asking you to grant my wish to attend school at Eagle Rock High School. . . . This is it I can choose my future from here. Graduate from Eagle Rock or live my life behind locked doors. . . .
>
> Thank you your Honor
> Sincerely,
> Jerry E. McGinnes

Judge Coyte made a deal: Jerry could attend Eagle Rock, but if he dropped out he faced the possibility of prison.

EAGLE ROCK SCHOOL, LODGED ON 640 ACRES bordering Colorado's majestic Rocky Mountain National Park, is nestled in a valley at the bottom of a steep, winding road. Like sentries, four mountain ridges stand guard over the campus. The effect, not unintentional, is that you feel protected from the pulls and temptations of the outside world, no small matter given the school's population: kids who, for whatever reason, haven't been able to conform to the more traditional setting of a public school. Some have dropped out or were regularly truant or simply uninterested in their studies. A handful, including Jerry McGinnes, have been in trouble with the law. A considerable number have taken refuge in drugs and drink. They are what some people might impoliticly refer to as throwaway kids, teen-agers who skate along the margins of mainstream society. It is a swelling population. Nationwide, 485,000 teen-agers dropped out of school last year, according to the U.S. Department of Education. In cities like Chicago and New York, barely one of every two entering freshmen graduates in four years. And these numbers don't include the multitudes who crawl into class indifferent, tired and just plain angry. The Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development has estimated that one in four young people — or seven million — is "extremely vulnerable to multiple high-risk behaviors and school failure."

This story might feel familiar — tough-love school tucked away in the wilderness turns wayward kids around — except that Eagle Rock, set up by a major corporation and run by a former hippie, is as singular as the landscape. At a time when so much of the discussion about education is centered on standards and testing, Eagle Rock has focused on personal growth and building community. At a time when schools are expelling a growing number of students as a result of zero-tolerance policies, Eagle Rock is embracing those same kids. Most leave with a moral compass and a piercing inquisitiveness. And so this still-fledgling school — it's five years old — has caught the eye of educators around the country.

My introduction to Eagle Rock was at the daily morning gathering in the main lodge, where the school's 69 students find a space on the carpeted floor fronting a stone hearth. They wear the defiant icons of teen-agedom: nose rings, mohawks, sagging jeans, bandannas, unlaced high-tops and platform shoes. The early-morning sun that streams through the windows warms the groggy adolescent bodies, as does the fact that the kids are wrapped in each other's arms. Some have their heads in friends' laps. One girl massages the shaved head of a boy. A boy combs the curls of the girl seated in front of him. At first glance, Eagle Rock, as one teacher said to me, appears to be "a very quaint, kind of 1960's touchy-feely type place." They're kids from Chicago's public housing, from the relatively privileged burg of Boulder and from a Wisconsin Indian reservation. A computer hacker and a gang member, a cowboy who is a recovering alcoholic and a football player who lost his bearings after busting his knee. But their commonality is simple: they are kids who couldn't, didn't, wouldn't — you pick the verb — fit in at their public schools.

First impressions matter little here. As I sat in at that morning gathering, noting the frequent hugs and oft-repeated idioms — "outside my comfort zone" was one of the more recurrent — I chafed at this feel-good approach to communal living. But as I soon learned, it masks a painstakingly considered philosophy of education.

Robert Burkhardt, the school's director and one of its primary architects, sits at the foot of the hearth. At 57, the former high-school and college swimmer has retained his solid build. Burkhardt lives on campus with his wife and two young children, so his presence is a constant, and the students compete for his enveloping embraces and dread his disapproving glares. This day, his attire — V-neck sweater, chinos and Vibram-soled topsiders — seemed a far cry from his days running a free school in San Francisco in the early 1970's. It would be too easy, though, to define Burkhardt by this well-traveled path since he is also a Shakespearean scholar and Princeton graduate.

Burkhardt had been directing the San Francisco Conservation Corps, a program that promotes service work among youth, when in 1990, American Honda approached him about helping to develop a school in the Rocky Mountains. Honda, which had been doing business in this country for 30 years, wanted to expand its philanthropic efforts and, after much deliberation, believed it could best contribute to American education, and more specifically assist teen-agers who have become disengaged from school. There is surprisingly little out there. Traditionally, parents who could afford it might ship their children off to military school; for the less fortunate, there are the alternative schools, which are often nothing more than a storefront and a bank of computers. And of course, there are special-education classes, frequently a dumping ground for emotionally uncentered teen-agers. So, at a cost of $17 million, Honda built Eagle Rock, a resortlike campus that in addition to six housing units includes a gym, complete with basketball court, weight room and swimming pool; a full-length soccer field; three classroom buildings; a main office, and the all-purpose lodge, where the kids eat, watch TV and attend the morning gatherings. Honda still invests $3.5 million a year, guaranteeing free tuition for each student.

Burkhardt, whose career has also involved stints as a circus juggler, a plumber, a high-school teacher and a Peace Corps volunteer in Iran, had a clear vision for the school. Given his belief in experiential learning, Burkhardt sends newly arriving students off on a three-week wilderness expedition. In an effort to cultivate a sense of community, each teen-ager averages 500 hours of service both on and off campus each year. An environmental-science class called Riverwatch measured the health of the local Big Thompson River for the state's Division of Wildlife. But Eagle Rock's most distinctive characteristic — and what has drawn educators there — is Burkhardt's effort to create community, a place where students take responsibility for one another and for themselves. This necessitated keeping the school small (it can handle 96 students) as well as teaching values, a loaded concept in a political climate that associates building character with religious moralism.

"Schools say they don't want religious values or ethical values because that's the province of the family," he told me one day over lunch. "They beguile themselves on that. Every school has values. *Where's your hall pass?* What's the value behind that? I don't trust you to walk down the halls and go to the bathroom. So what happens when I don't trust you? Well, your response is, 'I'll give you something not to trust me about,' which is

'I can choose my future from here,' Jerry McGinnes told the judge. 'Graduate from Eagle Rock or live my life behind locked doors.'

Alex Kotlowitz, author of "The Other Side of the River," is a frequent contributor to the magazine.

where so many of our students came from." What most strikes visitors to the school is the students' sense of belonging and purpose, traits not typical of whirling, self-absorbed adolescents.

Consider the morning gathering. Burkhardt asked if there were any announcements. Mat Kasper, a refugee from a New Jersey prep school who was decked out in sport coat and penny loafers, along with a ring through his chin, raised his hand to apologize to Kevin Skipper, an African-American boy from Brentwood, Calif. As a joke, Mat had shut off his housemate's alarm clock, making him miss the weekly 6:30 A.M. three-mile run. A petite girl raised her hand next, and confessed that she didn't rise for the morning jog, and so pledged to run it that night at 9, her earliest block of free time. ("There are no secrets at Eagle Rock," Burkhardt later told me.) And finally, to outstretched arms Burkhardt threw used paperbacks, from Rita Mae Brown's "Rubyfruit Jungle" to "A Death in the Family," by James Agee. Jerry McGinnes, reclining on the floor, rose briefly to snare a copy of Orwell's "1984."

JERRY WAS NOT WELL LIKED AT EAGLE ROCK — at least at the beginning. "Jerry was a royal pain," Burkhardt remembered. "He didn't much care about other people. Is there a word between violent and vicious?" In his first few weeks at the school, Jerry and some other students hiked Twin Sisters peak nearby, a four-and-a-half-mile steep climb. One of the girls in the group, Monique, stopped every 10 minutes for water. It frustrated Jerry, who is built of gristle and was unaffected by the high altitude. At the summit, it started to rain and turn cold, so Jerry urged everyone to snap their photos and get the hell down the mountain. In their rush, Monique twisted her ankle, slowing down the group even more. Turning to one of the other guys, he suggested, half-jokingly, that they push her off the ledge.

And not too much later, Jerry and some other boys named their group after a rap song that referred to women derisively. They carved the names of girls they didn't like on a stick, and soon word of the list got out. At that point, Burkhardt wasn't sure Jerry would last.

Not every student who enters Eagle Rock is as clearly agitated and troubled as Jerry, but almost all arrive with the view that learning is nothing more than a torturous rite of passage. So, how to engage these students — both in the school community and in the classroom? To understand Eagle Rock's educational philosophy you must look no farther than the artifacts scattered about Burkhardt's alcove. Below his desk lies a box of tattered paperbacks to hand out to students, as well as a pair of Nike high-tops (he plays on one of the intramural basketball teams), his trumpet and a pair of ice skates. The shelves above his desk are lined with books, from four biographies of Gandhi to Stanley Lombardo's new translation of the "Iliad." "Instruct by pleasing," he says, referring to the educator Homer Lane, who once wrote that we make moral progress when we're happy.

The school year, which runs the full 12 months, is divided into trimesters, during which students take four to six classes, all of them imaginatively titled and pieced together. In one class, appropriately named Beloved, students spent 12 weeks reading Toni Morrison's novel, as well as essays on slavery and on creative writing. In another class, Cabin, Sweet Cabin, students rebuilt a turn-of-the-century homestead (a little math coupled with some carpentry) while also learning about that historical period. Once students feel they have mastered their studies, they petition for graduation, and as a result commencement ceremonies can occur at the end of any trimester. There are no grades and few tests, and a student's maturation is considered almost equally with his or her academic progress. A gifted student who had met the academic requirements for graduation was asked to return for an additional trimester because the staff felt that she was socially immature.

One afternoon as I walked through the lodge I ran into Tara Trimmer-Jewell, a slender girl from Grand Rapids, Mich., who dropped out of school after becoming involved with the city's street gangs. She was pitched onto the dining-room table, her brunet hair falling across her face, hiding the book she was reading. Tara volunteered that while at Eagle Rock she had become enamored of William Blake's poetry. "He's so blunt," said Tara, whose dream is to attend Wellesley College. "There's nothing about him that walks around the subject. He's like right down to it. I admire him for being a rebel, I guess." Another student, James Masters, came to Eagle Rock after years of being shunted aside in special-education classes because of his dyslexia. "It was definitely clear they didn't think I'd go anywhere," he said of his public-school teachers. "Robert constantly threw books at me," he said. James became enamored of the existentialists, and constantly pulled aside visitors to talk philosophy. He is now a student at Berea College in Kentucky. Sixteen of the school's 31 other graduates have gone on to college as well. (Of the remaining, all but two or three are either working or in the military.)

Not all Eagle Rock students match James's and Tara's academic rigor and curiosity. Some arrive with grade-school reading levels; some rarely read. Indeed, some staff members are concerned that with all the emphasis on community and personal growth, the kids have not been held to a similar discipline in their studies. At the end of each trimester, students are required to give a "Presentation of Learning," a public exhibition to fellow students, the staff and visitors. I attended a dozen presentations, and while some informed, like 18-year-old Rachel Curran's lucid explanation of the Riverwatch class's findings, others lazily skimmed along their studies. One student, Brandie Pacheco, a painfully shy 17-year-old from New Mexico, presented slides of her classmates hamming it up while refurbishing the turn-of-the-century homestead; she made no mention of what she had learned.

Some teachers have suggested that the failure to earn any credits in a trimester should be reason for expulsion. "At the beginning I said it would take a full five years to get the culture down to where we wanted it," Burkhardt said. "The culture's getting fairly strong, but the second five years are redefining and refining the academics." Many students, with the school's encouragement, pursue studies independent of the classroom, especially in the arts.

HAT'S WHAT ULTIMATELY ENGAGED JERRY McGinnes. Jerry let down his guard slowly. He built a swing on campus and attended an anger-management group. He enchanted elementary-school kids from nearby Estes Park to whom he taught navigational skills. And he admitted to an epiphany of sorts. From the top of a nearby mountain, he witnessed a glorious sunset. "Yeah, I've seen a million and one sunsets," he told me. "But I was sitting there thinking, Travis" — a friend from Fort Collins — "is in jail and he can't even enjoy this now. That's when I realized, Wow, look at what I've got. I can't be such a jerk to everyone. Something just came to me. Wake up, Jerry."

Then one night last fall after 10 P.M. curfew, a group of boys snuck into the dorm of a frail boy they didn't like. They woke him up by pummeling him. The boys tried to get Jerry to join in, but he refused — though he had actually got dressed and then at the last minute bowed out. Weeks later at the morning gathering, the students were called on their misconduct. Jerry got up, his back against the wall, his hands clutching his shaven head. He rocked back and forth. "I was weak," he told his classmates. "I don't know why I didn't step up, hold you to your commitment."

At that moment, Burkhardt knew that Jerry had bought into Eagle Rock's values, its sense of community. Moreover, in the intervening months Jerry found an outlet for his anger: drawing. He began to paint exquisite watercolors, mostly of sunsets, and so Burkhardt asked Jerry to create a mural in the lodge. Jerry erected scaffolding above the entranceway to the kitchen and spent most days 30 feet off the ground, dressed in white painter's pants and apron, listening to the Grateful Dead, painting.

Jerry also began to re-establish a relationship with his parents, who adopted him when he was 6. "The 12 or so years we lived together, Jerry really never wanted to talk with us," his father, Darrel, told me. "This summer he called and we talked for 45 minutes." They talked mainly about the Global Positioning System, since Darrel McGinnes had given Jerry a G.P.S. instrument for his 19th birthday. While Jerry used to discard his gifts, he became obsessed with this offering, writing his senior paper on the subject.

During my first stay at Eagle Rock, Jerry's parents visited to view their son's mural. They stood beneath the painting of a rising sun that hovered over three wise men and an angel, the work not yet complete. Jerry nervously bounced from foot to foot. "Well, Jerry, I'm impressed," his mother, Carolyn, said. "Where are you putting your signature?" Jerry shrugged. He was scheduled to graduate in six weeks, but his parents were clearly anxious. "Always in the past when he made successes," his mother said later, "he'd make sure they wouldn't last." I noticed that she had her fingers crossed.

YOU WOULD BE HARD PRESSED TO IDENtify tight cliques at Eagle Rock, which is especially unusual in a place as diverse and self-contained as it is here. Roughly half the students are nonwhite. Jerry's close friends range from a girl from Trenton's inner city to a boy who lived in a trailer park out west. "I was just blown away," said one visiting educator who was awed by how nurturing the students were of one another.

And the students develop a firm sense of right and wrong. The school has strict behavioral limits, expelling students for committing what it calls "nonnegotiables" — fighting, taking drugs, smoking, having sex, anything that could harm the integrity of the community. The school permits, even encourages, expelled students to reapply for admission, and as many as one-third of the students at any given time are second-chancers. But equally interesting is that Burkhardt and his staff rarely have to be the bad guys; the students usually own up to their sins — often at the morning gatherings.

Halfway through last fall's trimester rumors spread of students who had committed nonnegotiables. At one gathering, a veteran student, Willow Moore, an avid kayaker from rural Wisconsin who had dropped out of school, admitted to having had sex four months earlier and to drinking whisky and smoking cigarettes. "I wanted it off my chest," she told me later. Afterward she confronted a housemate, Danielle Williams, a new student from the hardscrabble streets of Chicago, who she knew had also had sex with another stu-

Is Eagle Rock replicable? Perhaps. But Honda, which set up the school, spends roughly $25,000 a year per student — several times the average public-school expenditure.

dent. "You know you're cheating yourself and the community," she told Danielle, who then burst into tears. Willow kissed her on the forehead, assuring her, "It's going to be all right." Danielle soon confessed to her classmates at the hearth.

By now you have probably said to yourself: O.K., great stuff, but is Eagle Rock replicable? Let's be straight about it, since it is what every visitor asks: it is not, at least not in its entirety. For starters, most schools have their students only six or seven hours a day. Here, by Burkhardt's own admission, "it doesn't necessarily unravel at night, since we don't send the kids back to their poison — a troubled family, a dangerous environment, drugs, poverty, abuse." But more to the point, Honda spends roughly $25,000 per student each year, a figure several times the average public-school expenditure. The school provides students with all their essential needs, from books to gym uniforms, as well as with some nonessentials, like long-distance phone time, which has led staff members to worry that some kids become quickly spoiled.

Eagle Rock doesn't expect to be cloned. Instead, the hope is that visiting educators will apply pieces of the school to their own situations. An alternative school in Topeka, Kan., now holds "family meetings" modeled after Eagle Rock's morning gatherings. A new private school in Boston, Shackleton Schools, reworked its educational model after viewing Eagle Rock's. And Glenbrook South High School, in an affluent Chicago suburb, now has some seniors do end-of-the-year presentations of learning.

When Honda and Burkhardt designed Eagle Rock, they insisted it be a laboratory for educators, and so christened it the Eagle Rock School and Professional Development Center. Each year, as many as 2,000 teachers, principals and scholars pass through the campus, sitting in on classes and chatting with students, so many that the students occasionally complain of being in a fishbowl. Guests stay at a bunkhouse built specifically to accommodate them.

"We school people are really gifted and talented at finding reasons why the good things happening at another school can't possibly happen at *my* school," said Roland S. Barth, the founder of the Principals' Center at the Graduate School of Education at Harvard and a visitor to Eagle Rock. "There's a lot of conversation now about character, about values, about teaching respect. It's often rhetorical. I don't think many schools are as intentional at developing community and really being clear about what the values are of that community as is Eagle Rock." It would be only fair to point out that its components — smallness, teaching values, experiential learning, service requirements, presentations of learning — are not new. Rather it is the chassis that Eagle Rock has welded with each of these parts that presents such a startling new design.

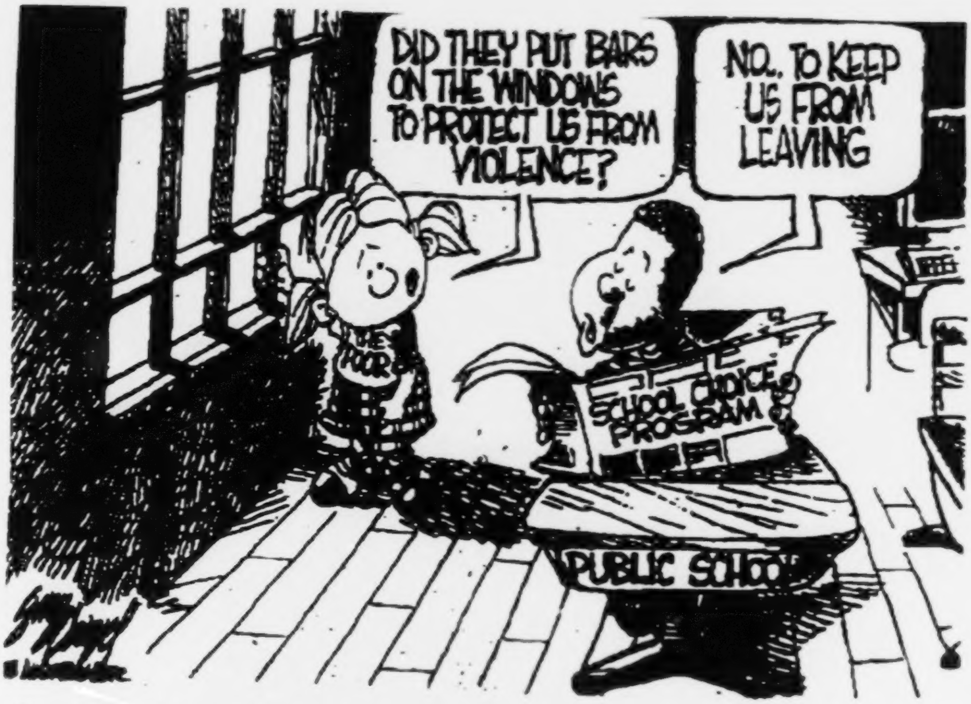
Has Eagle Rock been successful? The school has wrestled with a high attrition rate. Nearly half the students don't finish, though most who leave do so voluntarily in the first few months, usually during the rugged wilderness trip. But many who spend only two or three trimesters at Eagle Rock return to their public schools with the skills and outlook to flourish. Nonetheless, with applications on the rise, the school has become more discriminating in whom it admits, seeking teen-agers who are making some effort toward reclaiming their lives. (One school official suggested that under these new guidelines, Jerry might not have been admitted; moreover, the school prefers admitting younger teen-agers, usually 15- or 16-year-olds.) But the school has become most concerned about those who are forced out because of bad behavior, and so has begun to consider alternatives to expulsion. Ten students who had committed nonnegotiables, including Willow and Danielle, spent this past January camped along a ridge that bounds the property to the east. Each student was given three sheets of plywood and a tarp to build a sleeping structure; they smartly chose to pool their resources and construct one large shelter. They heated it with a wood fire and built their own furniture. Staff members, who camped with them, conducted daily classes. What I found most telling is that each of these students could have gone home and reapplied for admission. It certainly would have made for a more comfortable winter. But each of them chose to spend January warding off the Rocky Mountains' single-digit temperatures and gale-force winds.

"We've been giving them three hots and a cot and access to the gym and all this kind of stuff," Burkhardt said, "and now when they get back to it they're going to appreciate that a whole lot more." And besides, he added, his tone gentler, "the level of intimacy these kids need is staggering." Which brings me back to Jerry McGinnes, whose own journey is testament to the school's power to transform.

THE NIGHT BEFORE WHAT WOULD BE EAGLE Rock's largest graduation to date — five students — Jerry sat cross-legged on his unmade bed. He wore his painter's pants and a short-sleeved shirt patterned with dragonflies. The previous day he had given his final Presentation of Learning, in which he re-enacted his sentencing in court, and then, after exhibiting his artwork, told the 150 people present that at Eagle Rock "you have teachers who care so much, they sometimes care more than you do." Jerry had framed the sketch from which he painted the mural and presented it to Burkhardt. They embraced. "I'm not sure you understand how talented you are," Burkhardt told him. A psychologist to whom Jerry's parents had sent him was also present and, on the spot, offered Jerry a job as an assistant art instructor at a program he runs for troubled youth. Jerry, perched on his bed, told me he had accepted the position. But I wanted to talk with Jerry about something that had brought him to tears at his presentation. A staff member had asked Jerry, "What advice would you give Jed now?" Jed was one of the students expelled for the after-curfew assault; he had been for Jerry like a little brother. Jerry's voice again choked with emotion; he could barely respond. "He was just like me," Jerry told me as he pounded his right fist into an open palm. "What kills me is if I said, 'Jed, don't go,' he wouldn't have gone. Then I came to the realization that this kid's got to make his own decisions." Jerry stopped the pounding, and looked out the window at the snow-covered mountains. "It's hard to be leaving this place. I kind of don't want to."

At graduation the next day, Jerry, in a last act of defiance, wore white fluffy slippers given to him by two friends and sat onstage with his cap pulled low over his eyes. The gym was packed. Students. Staff. A dozen returning interns, as well as six returning graduates. Jerry, who was awarded a $1,000 college scholarship, got to the podium, leaned forward and blew out air. I could feel his nervousness. "I can't believe I did it," he sighed. "It's just amazing."

It is. But Burkhardt, who can be these kids' biggest cheerleader, had a few days earlier cautioned me that "Jerry's bought into a lot of the values here and they will flower over the next several years. They need nurturing with Jerry. And I'm hopeful that he will be in situations that he doesn't succumb to temptations. He may. But he's got a good start. He's got as good a start as we can give him." ■


DID THEY PUT BARS ON THE WINDOWS TO PROTECT US FROM VIOLENCE?
NO.. TO KEEP US FROM LEAVING
THE POOR
SCHOOL CHOICE PROGRAM
PUBLIC SCHOOL

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Selected Readings on School Reform

Standards, Testing, and Accountability

While the school choice debate continues to divide policymakers and citizens, almost everyone agrees about standards. We need them, they need to be set high, and they need to count. Even minority groups, some of whose spokesmen have long been wary of standards and their associated high-stakes testing, are showing overwhelming support, as is evidenced by Ann Bradley's article from *Education Week*, “Black Parents Want Focus on Academics.” It is based on the latest Public Agenda education survey, which found that eighty percent of African-American moms and dads believe that higher standards and achievement should be our schools' top priority. (Integration per se ranks lower with them.)

Anthony Trujillo, Superintendent of the Ysleta School District in El Paso, has made standards work for a largely minority district. Tyce Palmaffy tells the story in his *Policy Review* article, “Numero Uno.” By giving schools more freedom and holding them accountable for student achievement, Trujillo was able to boost test scores and enrollment—and renew his community's confidence in the public schools.

Christopher Jencks and Meredith Phillips have also been working hard to devise ways of reducing the achievement gap between whites and minorities, as outlined in their excellent *American Prospect* essay, “America's Next Achievement Test.”

Tough-minded standards-based reforms are certainly growing in popularity, but it's important to acknowledge that not everyone is well served by their consequences, at least in the short run. For an empathetic example, see the article by veteran *USA Today* reporter Tamara Henry entitled “‘High Stakes’ for Students.” Focusing on “high-stakes” exit exams, Henry describes the frustration and personal pain experienced by students who, for a variety of reasons, meet all their graduation requirements but fail the test, and hence fail to graduate.

We end this section with a special focus on the SAT. First, both David W. Murray (“The War Against Testing,” *Commentary*) and Adrian Wooldridge (“A True Test,” *The New Republic*) step up to defend this widespread but unloved admissions test, challenging claims that it is biased and discriminatory. Unfortunately, SAT's twin operators, the College Board and Educational Testing Service, have not maintained it as “the gold standard” as well as they should have. They “recentered” the test a few years ago to account for “the more diverse student population” taking the exam. Frankly, they lowered the bar. As a result, scores look a lot higher than they really are. We thought you'd want to see what the trend lines look like without recentering, so we have provided our own home-made charts to show what the scores look like on both scales—the old and the new.

Lots of journalists bought this year's “rising scores” story hook, line, and sinker. One even quoted NEA head Bob Chase as saying that the trend shows we should “stay the course.” Fortunately, William Honan of *The New York Times* got it right in “SAT Scores Decline Even as Grades Rise.” Maybe “A's” and “B's” need recentering!

SMF

Education Week, August 5, 1998

Black Parents Want Focus on Academics

By Ann Bradley

African-American parents, by an overwhelming margin, want the public schools to focus on achievement rather than on racial diversity and integration, a survey released last week says.

When asked what the bigger priority for schools should be, 80 percent of black parents chose raising academic standards and achievement, according to the survey by Public Agenda, a nonpartisan public-opinion research firm in New York City. Nine percent chose achieving diversity and integration, and 11 percent said both.

Public Agenda and the Public Education Network, a Washington-based group of nonprofit local education funds, plan to use the findings to engage Americans in conversations about race and education nationwide next year.

White parents in the survey, whom researchers found "very reluctant to talk about education in racial terms," expressed anxiety about integration. More than 60 percent of those polled said they believed discipline and safety problems, lower reading scores, and social problems would follow if large numbers of black students began attending a mostly white school.

Still, both groups of parents said that integration remained an important goal.

Eight in 10 black parents and 66 percent of white parents said it was very or somewhat important that their own child's school be racially integrated.

Nearly half of black parents said integration was very important, compared with 28 percent of whites.

"School integration serves important-mostly social-functions," the study concludes, "but academic achievement is, for both groups, a separate and independent issue."

The findings "challenge some commonly held assumptions about what African-American parents consider most important," said Deborah Wadsworth, the executive director of Public Agenda.

While black parents bring different experiences to the issue of public education from those of whites, she said, "their concern about quality education and academic standards and their agenda for achieving these is nearly identical."

Wendy D. Puriefoy, the president of the Public Education Network, called the results "exciting, affirming, and hopeful."

"There is common ground about the need for high-quality public education, common ground on what education ought to look like, and common ground that standards and good teaching and community support are essential," she said.

'Lack of Passion'

The study concludes that both groups of parents show "a distinctive lack of energy and passion for integration."

Those attitudes stem from both races' doubts that integration improves learning, the report says, and from white parents' fears that they will have to "forfeit the schools for which they searched long and hard."

"Time to Move On: African-American and White Parents Set an Agenda for Public Schools" presents the results of 30-minute telephone surveys of 800 black and 800 white parents conducted March 26 to April 17, as well as the findings from eight focus groups and individual interviews with parents and 22 public educators. The margin of error for both racial groups surveyed is plus or minus 3 percentage points.

The focus groups were separated by race in an attempt to make participants feel more comfortable about what they wanted to say. Public Agenda hopes to conduct similar research with other groups of minority parents, such as Hispanics and Asian-Americans.

Black parents' insistence on academic achievement reflects their fears about how their children are faring in schools, the report suggests. "In their minds, the problem is at crisis point," it says.

Most black parents (56 percent) estimated that fewer than half of black students attend good schools with good teachers. By contrast, 74 percent thought that white students attended good schools.

And while 48 percent of black parents thought that more than half of black students are doing well in school, 47 percent disagreed, saying that fewer than half were achieving, the study found.

Black parents believe the problems facing black students are widespread, affecting even those outside inner cities and without regard to family income.

In fact, 60 percent said they would switch their children from public to private schools if money were not an obstacle; only 38 percent would stay with their public schools.

White parents also saw problems with the education of African-American children, but tended to believe the problems were confined to low-income families and inner-city schools.

No Test Bias Seen

The survey also examines attitudes toward the issues of affirmative action in school hiring and of alleged racial bias in standardized testing.

Asked to choose among three ways to hire a superintendent in a mostly black district, 76 percent of black parents said the choice should be the best candidate, regardless of race. Only 4 percent would have hired a black candidate even if it meant turning away a better-qualified white candidate.

Three-fourths of black parents also said that a mostly black district should hire the best teachers possible, regardless of race.

"These findings are strong and consistent but somewhat counterintuitive," the report says, noting that 68 percent of black parents thought that there was some truth to the statement that teachers and principals, because of racial stereotypes, had lower expectations for black students.

The same proportion said that too many white teachers didn't know how to deal with black students because they were from different cultures.

Even though they believe black students "sometimes pay a price when taught by whites," the study says, black black parents-and whites concur-think that racial considerations divert schools from academics.

And although racial bias in standardized testing is a perennial issue, the study found that most African-American parents reject bias as a reason for black students' faring less well than whites on tests.

Only 28 percent attributed such gaps to cultural bias. Forty-four percent of black parents believed that the tests "measure real differences in educational achievement," while 18 percent cited a failure of expectations for the gap.

"A lot of parents don't lay down the law with their kids," the report quotes one black parent in Cleveland as saying. "It's the quality and effort and training, starting at home."

Indeed, 72 percent of black parents agreed that "too many black parents neglect to push their kids to work hard in school," a statement supported by 59 percent of white parents.

Neal Johnson, a senior research partner with the Educational Testing Service's Washington-based office of public leadership, said the study's findings jibe with the testing company's own research, which has found that the percentage of minority adults who believe testing is biased is dropping.

Ahead of Politicians

But he cautioned that Public Agenda polled only parents, who would tend to be younger than the African-American population at large and thus less likely to have experienced testing bias in their own school years.

"Parents are ahead of the politicians and the talk show pundits on the issue of test fairness," Mr. Johnson said. "They know what their kids are experiencing in terms of the quality of education, and these data suggest that they're proceeding with that information."

Beth Dilley, the executive director of the Grand Rapids (Mich.) Public Education Fund, which is affiliated with the Public Education Network, said the findings "absolutely mirror what we hear here."

"Everybody wants a really good future for their kids," she said. "I think it is unfortunate that so many people make judgments about parents of color wanting less for their kids, when they're trapped in a system they can't control."

Policy Review, September/October 1998

Numero Uno: El Paso Superintendent Anthony Trujillo Sets the Standard for Urban Schools

By Tyce Palmaffy

O**ne of America's** finest public-school superintendents is probably about to lose his job.

In his six years at the helm of the Ysleta School District in El Paso, Texas, Anthony Trujillo has built Ysleta into the highest-performing urban school district in the state, as measured by standardized tests. He has reversed years of declining enrollment, as families living outside the district now choose to send 2,000 children to Ysleta's 57 schools. And he has electrified teachers, principals, and parents in the district with his mission statement: "All students who enroll in our schools will graduate fluently bilingual and prepared to enter a four-year college or university."

Praise for Ysleta's turnaround has come from diverse sources, to say the least. Conservative House Speaker Newt Gingrich has said that Trujillo "may be the wisest education reformer I have met in my 55 years." Last year, the district won an annual award from the National Association for Bilingual Education for its "commitment to academic excellence through bilingual education." In December, the left-leaning *Sacramento Bee* editorialized, "[I]t would be hard for anybody in Sacramento, or any other struggling urban district, to argue against the principles that make the Ysleta example so compelling—standards, accountability and a demonstrated belief that school systems are run for the benefit of children, not the people who work in them."

And what is Trujillo's reward for his performance? The Ysleta school board is so eager to replace him that it is considering whether to offer him a lucrative buyout from his five-year contract, which ends in 2001. "The attempt to get rid of the superintendent, I believe, is nothing other than a personal vendetta," says Carlos Sandoval, a current member and past school board president. "I don't believe it's based on his performance." Board members have rightly criticized Trujillo for his lack of progress in boosting high-school performance. The district's Scholastic Achievement Test (SAT) scores continue to lag more than 100 points behind the state average. But they have ignored his extraordinary progress in boosting elementary-school and middle-school achievement.

Indeed, Ysleta has set the pace for test-score improvements in Texas, which in turn has set the pace for the nation. (See "The Gold Star State," *Policy Review*, March-April 1998, for an explanation of Texas's surging scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress.) Under a rigorous accountability system introduced in 1993, all Texas students in grades three through eight and grade 10 take Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) tests in reading, math, and writing. The state then assigns each school and district one of four rankings—"low performing," "acceptable," "recognized," or "exemplary"—based on the proportion of students passing the TAAS, as well as dropout and attendance rates. To ensure equity, a school's rating will only be as high as warranted by the scores of its worst-performing demographic subgroup. For instance, a school where 90 percent of the students passed the TAAS would merit an "exemplary" rating. But if, say, only 70 percent of its Hispanic students passed the TAAS, the school's rating would drop to "acceptable."

In 1994, two years after Trujillo took over, Ysleta had one "recognized" school and no "exemplary" schools. This year, 11 were rated "exemplary" and 33 "recognized." In 1993, there were seven "low-performing" schools; now there are none. The underlying improvement in students' test scores was dramatic: From 1993 to 1998, the percentage of Ysleta students who passed the state reading tests rose from 63 to 89 percent. In math, the percentage jumped from 41 to 86. Moreover, the achievement gap between Ysleta's whites and Hispanics has been slashed by two-thirds.

And this year, Ysleta became the first of Texas's eight largest school districts to achieve "recognized" status. That means at least 80 percent of Ysleta students overall and 80 percent or more of the students in each of five subgroups—black, Hispanic, white, Asian, and economically disadvantaged—passed the TAAS. This is even more impressive when one considers that Ysleta uses the "special education" label to exempt only 2 percent of its students (usually low performers) from the TAAS, versus 6 percent statewide, 8 percent in Dallas, 10 percent in Houston, and 11 percent in Fort Worth.

What is more, Ysleta serves the poorer, eastern half of El Paso, in one of the nation's poorest congressional districts. It faces all of the challenges that plague an urban district—dense concentrations of poverty, the lure of drugs and gang life, high rates of crime and teenage pregnancy—plus the consequences of its geography. Nestled in the dusty, westernmost corner of Texas, the district sits just across the Rio Grande from Ciudad Juarez, Mexico, guaranteeing a steady inflow of immigrant children and parents who hardly speak English.

Forty percent of Ysleta's students enter school with "limited English proficiency" (LEP), and its student population of 47,000 is nearly 90 percent Hispanic in a state where only 62 percent of Hispanics recently passed all three TAAS tests (versus 85 percent of whites).

Ysleta could use this gap as well as its overwhelming immigrant population as excuses for poor performance. But the district needs no excuses: The same percentage of Ysleta's Hispanic children passed all three TAAS tests as did Texas children overall. And Ysleta exempts a mere 2 percent of its students due to limited English skills (in addition to the 2 percent labeled "special ed"). Meanwhile, Trujillo has achieved this performance while cutting average spending per student by $200. The district now spends $4,900 per student, $400 below the state average of $5,300 per pupil.

It takes the talents and hard work of some 4,000 teachers and administrators to create a district like Ysleta. But what separates Ysleta from other districts full of talented staff is the environment within which Ysleta's educators toil. They enjoy leadership that gives schools the resources and freedom they need; incentives that encourage healthy competition among schools; a concrete, commonly understood mission and set of goals; the ability to customize a child's education using test data and computers; a bilingual-education program that actually succeeds in teaching students English; and a districtwide conviction that the schools are responsible for the well-being of every child and the entire community.

"This place is going to change the world," says Lawrence Lezotte, an education professor at Michigan State University and the head of Effective Schools, an educational consulting firm.

The Overhaul

It was not always so in Ysleta. When Trujillo was hired in February 1992, school buildings were crumbling from neglect, morale was low, and the district was still run much the same as it was during the record 50-year tenure of a former superintendent who had retired in 1980. Conditions were so alarming that the state education agency had assigned a monitor to watch over the district and had even considered a state takeover.

Desperate to retain local control, the Ysleta school board lured Trujillo out of retirement on the strength of the national reputation he had earned during a successful but turbulent 35-year career in California schools. His most recent employer, the Sweetwater Union High School District, near San Diego, California, paid him a hefty severance to leave early despite the district's widely acknowledged improvement during his time as superintendent. (In 1989, a teacher and former union official had leveled charges of corruption against Trujillo's administration. Although a grand jury and a state auditor found no evidence of wrongdoing, the accusations tarnished Trujillo's image.)

Trujillo's leadership style has been no less controversial in El Paso. During his six years in the district, Ysleta has been racked by bitter public infighting among board members, much of it waged between those who support Trujillo and those who would prefer to see him go. Several board members have criticized him for focusing too much on TAAS scores to the exclusion of other skills, but the main disagreement seems to be over whether Trujillo or the board ought to manage the district. His critics on the board have proposed to establish personnel and finance committees that would approve job candidates and control the bidding process for district contracts, thus limiting Trujillo's ability to determine spending priorities and form his own team of administrators and school leaders. "He doesn't want to have anybody tell him what to do," says Charles Peartree, the school board's secretary. "If he would mind his p's and q's and work with the board, then I would have no problem with him staying on."

It is not hard to see why the current board feels impotent. The board that hired Trujillo gave him wide latitude to run the district as he saw fit, even amending his contract to hand the board's authority to hire and fire over to him (a power the current board sued unsuccessfully to take back).

It was this latitude, though, that would prove crucial in establishing firm and enforceable expectations for Ysleta's principals and teachers. In his first meeting with the district's principals, he noted they had all received satisfactory evaluations while the students continued to fail, and said, "This is the strangest district I've ever been in. It has the dumbest students and the brightest adults." His solution to this apparent contradiction did not go over well: They all received one-year contracts, not the three-year renewals they had expected. He soon placed all new teachers on one-year contracts, as well.

In the five years since then, 32 of 51 principals have left the district or retired, as have 2,000 of 3,000 teachers (twice the previous turnover rate of 200 teachers a year). Trujillo also shuffled the remaining principals around the district to find good fits among the school leadership, the staff, and the surrounding community; within two years, only two of the district's seven high-school principals remained at their original schools. (In most states, union rules block superintendents from making such sweeping moves; Texas education unions have no collective-bargaining rights.) The one-year contracts gave Trujillo added flexibility in laying off principals who failed to meet his expectations, but in the end the threat was more important than any action—no principals have actually been fired. Now principals whose schools are "recognized" or "exemplary" for two years are awarded multi-year contracts, and those principals may recommend members of their staffs for similar pacts.

More drastic steps were taken at Bel Air High. Though its test scores were good enough for an "acceptable" rating, Ysleta officials concluded that the culture of low expectations ran so deep at the school that fresh blood was needed. So they "reconstituted" Bel Air, meaning the entire staff was asked to reapply. Fewer than 50 percent were rehired. Trujillo points to the reconstitution as a signal event in Ysleta's comeback. "That sent a shock wave through the system," he says. "It showed that I was dead serious about getting results."

He next established an "open enrollment" policy under which students were allowed to transfer to any district school that had room. More importantly, the district also changed its budgeting policy so that when a student changes schools, his per-pupil funding follows him: High schools receive $4,200 per student, middle schools $4,400, and elementary schools $3,800, with additional funding for special education and LEP students. Principals must now retain and attract children or else watch the money walk away. The district estimates that 3,000 of Ysleta's 47,000 students switched schools in the first year of this public-school "choice" plan.

Imposing such vigorous competition on principals who, as in most districts nationwide, did not even wield the power to hire their own staffs would have been unfair. So Trujillo gave principals broad discretion in running their schools. "They pretty much let us operate our campuses," says Frank Burton, the principal of Hillcrest Middle School. "If we need help, they provide it. If we don't, they leave us alone. [Trujillo] lets you do your job." In turn, the state's accountability system gave the district the tools to set clear, meaningful goals and to measure performance and progress.

The Best Little District in Texas

Like all urban school districts in Texas, Ysleta has a large immigrant population (at any one time, 22 percent of its students have limited English skills, versus 13 percent statewide) and dense concentrations of poverty (68 percent are economically disadvantaged, versus 48 percent statewide). Yet Ysleta students pass the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) at far higher rates than their peers among the state's eight largest school districts—and even beat the statewide pass rates. Below are the percentages of students in the "Big 8" and statewide, in three ethnic and racial categories, who passed all three of the state's basic-skills tests in 1997. All three groups in Ysleta topped 80 percent in 1998.

	% of students passing TAAS			Per-pupil
District	**Whites**	**Blacks**	**Hispanics**	**spending**
Austin	85	44	51	$5,137
Corpus Christi	85	58	64	$4,942
Dallas	78	49	54	$5,179
El Paso	84	60	60	$5,013
Fort Worth	82	44	49	$5,053
Houston	90	60	58	$5,226
San Antonio	69	41	49	$5,663
Ysleta	**84**	**69**	**72**	**$4,885**
TEXAS	85	56	62	$5,282

Source: Texas Education Agency

A Magnet for Others

More recently, Ysleta was able to capitalize on a clause in the Texas education code that allows districts to open their doors to students from neighboring districts. In 1993, the state responded to a court order to equalize school funding throughout Texas by raising the state's subsidies to poor districts. The state now funds 50 percent or more of every school district's budget (nearly 70 percent in Ysleta's case), and the amount of state aid is based on a district's average daily attendance, no matter where the kids come from. Last year, 2,000 nonresident children streamed into Ysleta schools, reversing years of declining enrollment and bringing millions of dollars in state aid (roughly $3,800 per student) with them.

This has enabled Trujillo to spend nearly $20 million a year on school renovation, technology upgrades, and other capital improvements. He has targeted most of this funding into the schools south of Interstate 10, which for years has been the dividing line between the haves and have-nots. Those south of the highway suffered from decades of neglect, mainly because the residents living north of the highway were wealthier and spoke better English.

Trujillo shook up central administration as well, changing its culture from one of oversight to one of customer service. "We flattened the organization," he says. "We said the resources were here to support the schools, the schools are not here to support us." The curriculum supervisors for each grade level and subject were organized into four intervention teams and sent into the field. Initially they focused their skills and experience on low-performing schools, but there are none left. So four teams of 15 each were whittled down to two teams of 10, and they serve as roving curriculum and management consultants to schools that request help. Many of the superfluous administrators were sent back into the schools as principals and assistant principals, trimming the central administration budget from $9.9 million to $8.2 million.

The District of the Future

If the story of Ysleta were solely one of a hard-driving superintendent, market-style reforms, and rising test scores, that would be enough to distinguish it from the vast majority of urban districts. But Ysleta educators, though they draw great pride from test results, recognize that the TAAS is merely a test of minimum skills. "You really shortchange children when you teach to the tests," says Gloria Hoyos, a teacher at Ascarate Elementary. "We pride ourselves on teaching higher-order thinking." And their mission statement—that all students will be fluently bilingual and prepared for college—demands more than minimum skills.

If you talk to Ysleta officials about bilingual education, they will praise bilingualism as an asset. "You used to get paddled for speaking Spanish in school," says Lionel Nava, the principal of Riverside High. "Now Spanish is becoming a business language. I tell my kids, 'Don't lose that language.' " This makes sense when one considers that they live as close to Mexico as Americans can without changing citizenship. In El Paso, and especially in the Ysleta school district, bilingual employees are highly valued.

Ysleta's high pass rates on the TAAS English-language tests indicate that Ysleta's approach to bilingual education does indeed work. In turn, Ysleta's success with bilingual education suggests that the problems with bilingual education may not be the pedagogy itself but the absence of accountability and the failure to measure progress.

In Texas, a child labeled "LEP" may take the state tests in Spanish for up to three years before he must switch to the English-language version. If he still isn't fluent in English, his test scores will then drag down his school's rating. So Ysleta closely tracks its LEP population, testing their language skills at the beginning of each year. Their level of English proficiency is scored on a scale of one to five (four indicates full fluency, five extreme proficiency). After four years in the program, children are expected to reach level four. Any child that hasn't will receive one-on-one tutoring. The district also produces a report for principals that identifies kids who have fallen into the "danger zone"; that is, haven't met certain benchmarks on the way to full fluency. Teachers give them more help.

"It isn't that hard to get kids to learn two languages," says Irma Trujillo, the director of the district's bilingual programs (and no relation to the superintendent). "People have just not put in the time and trouble to monitor academic progress and to expect it."

It may disappoint bilingual ed's critics to learn that Ysleta does not practice immersion. On the contrary, each district school uses one of two bilingual methods, either "Spanish 5" (also known as "late exit") or "two-way dual language." In Spanish 5, 90 percent of a child's instruction in first grade is in Spanish, and that percentage slides to 50 percent by the fourth grade. In the early grades, academic concepts are introduced in Spanish first. Once a child learns a concept, he is also taught the English vocabulary associated with it. By the time they begin learning to read English in the third grade, they already know how to read and they know many English words.

Most Ysleta schools use Spanish 5, which focuses solely on LEP students, but by the turn of the century all schools will use two-way dual language in order to meet the district's goal of having *every* student graduate bilingual. (Within the next decade, Trujillo predicts, Ysleta will make bilingualism a graduation requirement.) In "two-way," a classroom is assembled with an equal number of native Spanish speakers and native English speakers. At first, they receive most of their instruction in Spanish, because English-speaking children can be immersed without losing their English skills. Spanish-speaking kids immersed in English, by contrast, may not otherwise hear enough Spanish to retain their fluency. By the fourth or fifth grade, the teacher is conducting classes half in Spanish, half in English.

In eight "schools-within-a-school" around the district, students choose whether they want to learn in "two-way" classrooms. At Alicia Chacon International School and Hacienda Heights, both elementary schools, the entire school is "two-way" and 10 percent of class time is spent learning a third language, including Mandarin Chinese, German, or Russian. For 130 spots, Alicia Chacon had 300 applicants last year.

A School for Every Child

Alicia Chacon and Hacienda are just two of several district "magnet" schools that cater to the intellectual diversity and various needs of Ysleta's students. Bel Air High is a health-professions magnet school for students interested in becoming doctors, nurses, or X-ray technicians. Ysleta High, which was in such disrepair that state officials recommended its demolition, has become the district's performing-arts magnet. The school recently added a new music wing and plans to add two dance studios and a black-box theater. Mission Elementary builds its educational approach around the principles and organization of the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts. Most of the students have become scouts and many of the teachers are scoutmasters; the school pays for uniforms.

Sageland Elementary runs a "microsociety" in which students earn "microbucks" for attendance and "purchase" products from student-run businesses. A separate building houses businesses and government agencies such as the post office, the El Pueblo restaurant, and a courthouse with all the accouterments: a witness stand, an American flag, and a haughty judge. Students learn to revile the taxman early in life. Internal Revenue Service agent and fifth-grader Augustine Valverde says, "What I like about the microsociety is when I go to the classrooms, they all say, 'Do I have to pay the taxes again?'" Sageland students graduate to Ranchland Hills Middle School, and the principal there says, "Of my students, [the ones from Sageland] are very confident, the most creative. Our leaders are from the microsociety."

The district funds Sageland's microsociety through a $3-million grant program it established to encourage innovation at the school and classroom level. Any teacher or principal with a promising idea may write a grant proposal; Sageland won nearly $200,000 to operate the microsociety. Sageland kids who want to continue learning about business can operate a firm at the Student Entrepreneur Center, a 14-acre site that holds quarterly "mercados," or flea markets, where students hawk their wares. In the future, Trujillo hopes to establish a magnet program for entrepreneurialism there.

Perhaps no Ysleta school better represents Trujillo's commitment to the education of every child than Cesar Chavez Academy. Its wrought-iron gate, stone pillars, manicured lawn, and tree-lined driveway lend the appearance of an old Southern plantation home, but its set of Pepto-Bismol-colored, one-room school buildings suggest you've entered Candyland. Nothing about its appearance suggests that it houses Ysleta's most troubled kids.

Students who are expelled from other schools or who land in the juvenile justice system are sent to Cesar Chavez. Principal Lilia Limon says 67 different street gangs are represented on campus. Yet as you walk the school's grounds, students clad in red shirts and black pants introduce themselves, deliver firm handshakes, and say, "It's nice to meet you." You enter a classroom and the students stand, line up, and greet you one at a time. Limon claims the school had only three fights last year.

In most districts, these kids would be the castaways, the incorrigibles. At Cesar Chavez, they have at least 10 computers in each classroom and a staff that treats them like family. "I always felt unwanted everywhere else except here," says one student. The school's reputation has grown so much that two-thirds of its students are now there by choice. Rosa Aguilar had dropped out of school to support her family; she came to Chavez Academy and recently received a $1,000 scholarship from an educational software firm to attend New Mexico State University.

Threats to Success

As its SAT scores indicate, Ysleta still has a long way to go before all students are prepared to enter a four-year college. Tenth grade, the only high-school grade that takes the TAAS, is also the only grade in which Ysleta students still trail the state average, though that gap has narrowed significantly. Some districts in this situation might discourage low-performing students from taking the SAT to inflate their average scores, but Ysleta has nothing to hide. The district has in fact begun paying the test fees for students taking the SAT or the Preliminary SAT (PSAT), as well as offering SAT mini-camps during the summer free of charge. "We will see a huge jump in scores over the next two years," promises Trujillo. The district has also raised the academic requirements for graduation, including four years of college-preparatory math, science, and English, to align them with typical college requirements.

Unfortunately, it seems likely that a foolish school board bent on self-aggrandizement will push Trujillo out before he can accomplish all that he wants. The school district had pulled him out of retirement, and at his age (65), his farmhouse in Virginia looks more appealing than battles with a school board that will not support him. He has indicated that if the school board meets his buyout demands, he will probably leave sometime this fall.

But if he does go, he will leave behind a group of school principals and teachers who have tasted success. They have matured in a culture that demanded more from them, perhaps more than they thought could be done. What impresses about Ysleta is not the beaming children, nor the beautiful buildings, nor the hyperinvolved parents, nor the ratio of three computers to every child. It's the attitudes of the educators, who repeatedly say, without prompting, that "no excuses" are accepted in Ysleta, or constantly beg you to visit their schools, to see the innovative things they are doing. This is what happens when people are given both freedom and responsibility. And there's no reason it couldn't happen everywhere else.

The American Prospect, September/October 1998

AMERICA'S NEXT ACHIEVEMENT TEST

CLOSING THE BLACK-WHITE TEST SCORE GAP

BY CHRISTOPHER JENCKS AND MEREDITH PHILLIPS

African Americans currently score lower than European Americans on vocabulary, reading, and math tests, as well as on tests that claim to measure scholastic aptitude and intelligence. This gap appears before children enter kindergarten, and it persists into adulthood. It has narrowed since 1970, but the median American black still scores below 75 percent of American whites on most standardized tests. On some tests the typical American black scores below more than 85 percent of whites.

The black-white test score gap does not appear to be an inevitable fact of nature. It is true that the gap shrinks only a little when black and white children attend the same schools. It is also true that the gap shrinks only a little when black and white families have the same amount of schooling, the same income, and the same wealth. But despite endless speculation, no one has found genetic evidence indicating that blacks have less innate intellectual ability than whites. Thus while it is clear that eliminating the test score gap would require enormous effort by both blacks and whites and would probably take more than one generation, we believe it can be done. This conviction—supported at greater length in the new collection of studies we have edited, *The Black-White Test Score Gap*, soon to be published by the Brookings Institution—rests mainly on three facts:

- *IQ and achievement scores are sensitive to environmental change.* Scores on nonverbal IQ tests have risen dramatically throughout the world since the 1930s. The average white scored higher on the Stanford-Binet test in 1978 than 82 percent of whites who took the test in 1932.
- *Black-white differences in academic achievement have also narrowed throughout the twentieth century.* The best trend data come from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), which has been testing seventeen-year-olds since 1971 and has repeated many of the same items year after year. From 1971 to 1996, the black-white reading gap shrank by almost half and the math gap by a third. [See "The Diminished Gap in Reading and Math Scores," page 45.] According to a study by two sociologists, Min-Hsiung Huang and Robert Hauser, the black-white vocabulary gap also shrank by half among adults born between 1909 and 1969.

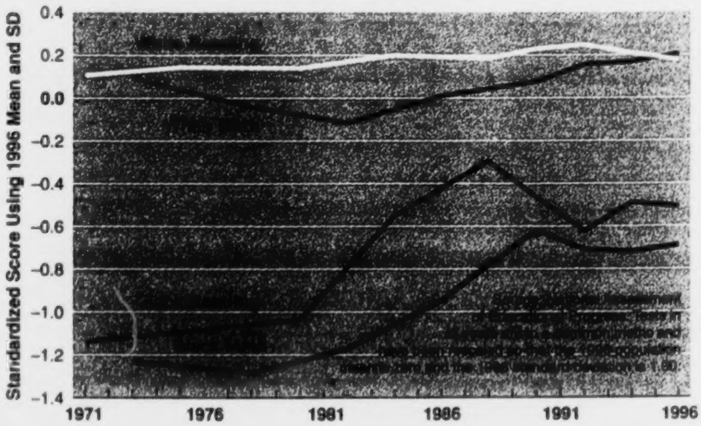
- *When black or mixed-race children are raised in white rather than black homes, their pre-adolescent test scores rise dramatically.* Black adoptees' scores seem to fall in adolescence, but this is what we would expect if, as seems likely, their social and cultural environment comes to resemble that of other black adolescents and becomes less like that of the average white adolescent.

WHY TEST SCORES MATTER

In a country as racially polarized as the United States, no single change taken in isolation could possibly eliminate the entire legacy of slavery and Jim Crow or usher in an era of full racial equality. But if racial equality is America's goal, reducing the black-white test score gap would probably do more to promote this goal than any other strategy that could command broad political support. Reducing the test score gap is probably both necessary and sufficient for substantially reducing racial inequality in educational attainment and earnings. Changes in education and earnings would in turn help reduce racial differences in crime, health, and family structure, although we do not know how large these effects would be.

The Diminished Gap in Reading and Math Scores

Black and White 17-Year-Olds



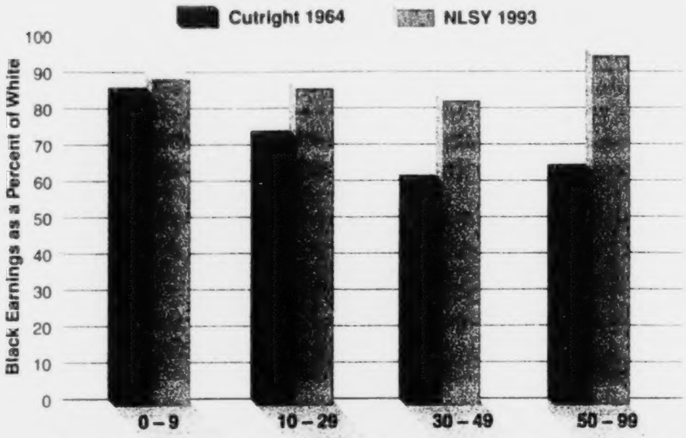
This judgment contradicts the conclusion of *Inequality*, a study published in 1972 by one of us (Christopher Jencks), which argued that reducing cognitive inequality would not do much to reduce economic inequality. The reason for the contradiction is simple: the world has changed. In 1972, the best evidence about what happened to black workers with high test scores came from a study by Phillips Cutright, who had analyzed the 1964 earnings of men in their thirties who had taken the Armed Forces Qualification Test (AFQT) between 1949 and 1953. Overall, employed black men earned 57.5 percent of what whites earned. Among men with AFQT scores above the national average, black men earned 64.5 percent of what whites earned. In such a world, eliminating racial differences in test performance did not seem likely to reduce the earnings gap very much.

Today's world is different. The best recent data on test scores and earnings come from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY), which gave the Armed

Services Vocational Aptitude Battery to a national sample of young people in 1980. Among employed men who were 31 to 36 years old in 1993, blacks earned 67.5 percent of what whites earned—a modest but significant improvement over the situation in 1964. The big change occurred among blacks with test scores near or above the white average. Among men who scored between the thirtieth and forty-ninth percentiles nationally, black earnings rose from 62 to 84 percent of the white average. Among men who scored above the fiftieth percentile, black earnings rose from 65 to 96 percent of the white average. [See "More-Equal Scores Now Bring More-Equal Earnings," below.] In this new world, raising black workers' test scores looks far more important than it did in the 1960s.

More-Equal Scores Now Bring More-Equal Earnings

Ratio of Black to White Annual Earnings in 1964 and 1993 for Employed Men in Their Early Thirties, by Percentile Score on a Military Test Taken Between the Ages of 18 and 23



Sources: Cutright and authors' tabulations from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY). Cutright's version of the AFQT included vocabulary, arithmetic, and spatial relations. Our NLSY approximation of Cutright's AFQT included word knowledge, numerical operations, and mechanical reasoning. See our introduction to *The Black-White Test Score Gap* for details on the samples and standard errors.

Some skeptics have argued that scores on tests of this kind are really just proxies for family background. Family background does affect test performance. If we compare random pairs of children, their IQ scores differ by an average of 17 points. Among pairs of children who have been adopted into the same family, the difference averages about 15 points. Even if we compare pairs of biological siblings reared in the same family, their IQ scores still differ by an average of 12 or 13 points. The claim that test scores are only a proxy for family background is therefore false. Furthermore, test score differences between siblings raised in the same family have sizable effects on their educational attainment and earnings. Thus while it is true that eliminating the black-white test score gap would not eliminate the black-white earnings gap, the effect would surely be substantial.

Reducing the black-white test score gap would reduce racial disparities in educational attainment as well as earnings. The nationwide "High School and Beyond" survey tested twelfth graders in 1982 and followed them up in 1992, when they were in their late twenties. At the time of the follow-up only 13.3 percent of the blacks had earned a bachelor's degree, compared to 30 percent of the non-Hispanic whites. Many observers blame this disparity on black parents' inability to pay college bills, black students' lack of motivation, or the hostility that black students encounter on predominantly white college campuses. All these factors probably play some role. Nonetheless, when we compare blacks and whites with the same twelfth-grade test scores, blacks are *more* likely than whites to complete college. Once we equalize test scores, High School and Beyond blacks' 16.7-point disadvantage in college graduation rates turns into a 5.9-point advantage.

Eliminating racial differences in test performance would also allow colleges, professional schools, and employers to phase out the racial preferences that have caused so much political trouble over the past generation. If selective colleges based their admission decisions solely on applicants' predicted college grades, their undergraduate enrollment would currently be 96 or 97 percent white and Asian. To avoid this, almost all selective colleges and professional schools admit African Americans and Hispanics whom they would not admit if they were white. If selective colleges could achieve racial diversity without making race an explicit factor in their admission decisions, blacks would do better in college and whites would nurse fewer political grudges.

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Advocates of racial equality might be more willing to accept our argument that narrowing the test score gap is crucial to achieving their goals if they believed that narrowing the gap was really feasible. But pessimism on this front has become almost universal. In the 1960s, racial egalitarians routinely blamed the test score gap on the combined effects of black poverty, racial segregation, and inadequate funding for black schools. That analysis implied obvious solutions: raise black children's family income, desegregate their schools, and equalize spending on schools that remain racially segregated. All these steps still look useful, but none has made as much difference as optimists expected in the early 1960s.

- The number of affluent black parents has grown substantially since the 1960s, but their children's test scores still lag far behind those of white children from equally affluent families. Income inequality between blacks and whites appears to play some role in the test score gap, but it is quite small.
- Most southern schools desegregated in the early 1970s, and southern black nine-year-olds' reading scores seem to have risen as a result. Even today, black third graders in predominantly white schools read better than initially similar blacks who have attended predominantly black schools. But large racial differences in reading skills persist even in desegregated schools, and a school's racial mix has little effect on reading scores after sixth grade or on math scores at any age.
- Despite glaring economic inequalities between a few rich suburbs and nearby central cities, the average black child and the average white child now live in school districts that spend almost exactly the same amount per pupil. Black and white schools also have the same average number of teachers per pupil, the same pay scales, and teachers with almost the same amount of formal education and teaching experience. The most important resource difference between black and white schools seems to be that both black and white teachers in black schools have lower test scores than their counterparts in white schools.

For all these reasons, the number of people who think they know how to eliminate racial differences in test performance has shrunk steadily since the mid-1960s. While many people still think the traditional liberal remedies would help, few now believe they would suffice.

Demoralization among liberals has given new legitimacy to conservative explanations for the test score gap. From an empirical viewpoint, however, the traditional conservative explanations are no more appealing than their liberal counterparts. These explanations fall into three overlapping categories: the culture of poverty, the scarcity of two-parent black families, and genes.

- In the 1960s and 1970s many conservatives blamed blacks' problems on a culture of poverty that rejected school achievement, the work ethic, and the two-parent family in favor of instant gratification and episodic violence. In the 1980s conservatives (as well as some liberals) characterized the "black underclass" in similar terms. But this description fits only a tiny fraction of the black population. It certainly cannot explain why children from affluent black families have much lower test scores than their white counterparts.
- Conservatives invoke the decline of the family to explain social problems almost as frequently as liberals invoke poverty. But once we control for a mother's family background, test scores, and years of schooling, whether she is married has even less effect on her children's test scores than whether she is poor.
- Scientists have not yet identified many of the genes that affect test performance, so we have no genetic evidence regarding innate cognitive differences between blacks and whites. But we have accumulated a fair amount of indirect evidence since 1970. Most of it suggests that whether children live in a "black" or "white" environment has far more impact on their test performance than the number of Africans or Europeans in their family tree [see "The Heredity-Environment Controversy," page 48].

CULTURE AND SCHOOLING

Taken as a whole, then, what we have characterized as the "traditional" explanations for the black-white test score gap do not take us very far. This has led some people to dismiss the gap as unimportant, arguing that the tests are culturally biased and do not measure skills that matter in the real world. Few scholars who spend time looking at quantitative data like that in the figure on page 46 accept either of these arguments, so they have had to look for new explanations of the gap. These new explanations can mostly be grouped under two overlapping headings: schooling and culture.

Social scientists' thinking about "school effects" has changed substantially since the late 1960s. The 1966 Coleman Report and subsequent studies convinced most economists and quantitative sociologists (including Jencks) that school resources had little impact on achievement. Since 1990, however, new statistical methods, new data, and a handful of genuine experiments have suggested that additional resources may in fact have sizable effects on student achievement. The notion that resources matter cannot in itself explain the black-white achievement gap, because most school resources are now fairly equally distributed between blacks and whites. But certain crucial resources, like teachers with high test scores, are still quite unequally distributed. And other resources, like small classes and teachers with high expectations, may help blacks more than whites.

Equally important is the fact that predominantly black schools enroll far more children with severe academic and behavioral problems than white schools do. Such children consume many times more resources than the average child. To begin with, they are often assigned to very small classes (for the "educably mentally retarded," for example). In addition, schools where many children have serious academic, emotional, or disciplinary problems need more reading specialists, more psychologists, and more security guards. That leaves less money for regular teachers. Finally, children with serious problems consume a disproportionate share of their teachers' time when they are in regular classes, leaving less time for other students. The net result is that while predominantly black schools spend about as much per pupil as predominantly white schools, ordinary black children without special problems are likely to be in larger classes, get less attention, and have less academically skilled teachers than similar white children.

Nonetheless, disparities between black and white schools cannot explain why black children enter preschool with smaller vocabularies than white children. This fact must reflect differences between black and white children's experiences before they enter school. While racial disparities in income, parental education, family size, and the like explain some of the test score gap among preschool children, they do not explain most of it. That fact has forced many scholars to take cultural explanations more seriously.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, many liberals and radicals dismissed cultural explanations of the test score gap as an effort to put down blacks for not thinking and acting like upper-middle-class whites. Since then, cultural explanations have enjoyed a slow but steady revival. In 1978, the Nigerian anthropologist John Ogbu suggested that caste-like minorities throughout the world tended to do poorly in school, even when they were visually indistinguishable from the majority. Later, Ogbu made this argument more specific, suggesting that because of their caste-like status, blacks developed an "oppositional" culture that equated academic success with "acting white." By linking black culture directly to oppression, Ogbu made it much easier for liberals to talk about cultural differences. Jeff Howard and Ray Hammond added another important strand to this argument when they suggested that academic competence develops partly through competition, and that "rumors of inferiority" make blacks reluctant to compete in the academic arena. More recently, Claude Steele has argued that people of all races avoid situations in which they expect others to have negative stereotypes about them, even when they know that the stereotype does not apply. According to Steele, many black students "disidentify" with school because constructing a personal identity based on academic competence entails a commitment to dealing with such stereotypes on a daily basis. In a series of elegant experiments with Stanford students, Steele has also shown that merely asking test-takers to report their race or telling them that a test measures intellectual ability lowers black students' scores.

Cutright's 1964 finding that blacks with high test scores earned little more than those with low test scores may also help explain why blacks did so badly on these tests. In an economy where high-scoring blacks had very limited job opportunities, few blacks had any reason to suppose that they would win anyone's respect by acquiring a larger vocabulary, better mathematical skills, or more information about science, history, and literature. As we have seen ["More-Equal Scores Now Bring More-Equal Earnings, page 46"], the world has changed since 1964. But it always takes several generations for any group to adjust to a new reality, especially when the adjustment has significant costs (spending more time studying). The message that nerds will do well as adults is always hard to sell to children, but it is doubly hard to sell when it has only recently become true.

CAN WE EXPLAIN MORE OF THE GAP?

The available evidence shows that traditional explanations for the black-white test score gap do not work very well. If genes play any role, it is probably quite small. Poverty probably plays some role, but it too is modest. School desegregation probably reduced the black-white gap in the South during the 1970s, and desegregating northern elementary schools might raise blacks' reading scores today, but the gain would not be huge. Reducing class size in the early grades would probably raise scores more for blacks than whites, and reducing class size in later grades might help preserve these black gains, although this latter conclusion is based on conjecture rather than firm evidence. Screening teachers for verbal and mathematical competence (or raising the competence of those already employed) is also likely to raise black children's scores.

The United States should be conducting large-scale experiments aimed at reducing uncertainty about the effects of schools' racial mix, class size, teachers' test scores, ability grouping, and many other policies. We do such experiments to determine the effects of different medical treatments, different job training programs, and many other social interventions. But the U.S. Department of Education, which should in principle be funding experiments from which every state and school district would benefit, has shown almost no interest in this approach to advancing knowledge. The most important piece of educational research in the past generation, the Tennessee class size experiment, showed that small classes in the early grades made a big difference, especially for blacks—yet it was funded by the Tennessee legislature, not the U.S. Department of Education. Experimental assessments of other educational policies that have a major impact on school spending—salary levels, teacher selection systems, education for the physically and mentally disabled, and bilingual education, for example—have been almost nonexistent.

If we did more experiments, we might eventually develop better theories. At present, theorizing about the causes of the black-white gap is largely a waste of time, because there is no way to resolve theoretical disagreements without data that both sides accept as valid. Most theories about human behavior start out as hunches, anecdotes, or ideological predispositions. Such theories improve only when they have to confront evidence that the theorist cannot control. In education, that seldom happens.

Our best guess is that successful new theories about the causes of the black-white gap will differ from traditional theories in at least three ways:

- Instead of looking mainly for resource differences between predominantly black and predominantly white schools, successful theories will concentrate on differences in the way black and white schools spend the resources available to them—differences that probably derive in large part from the disproportionate number of black children with severe academic or psychological problems, but that probably prevent ordinary black children in the same schools from getting as much attention and support as their counterparts in white schools.
- Instead of concentrating on whether teachers treat black and white children differently, successful theories will probably pay more attention to the way black and white children respond to the same classroom experiences, such as having a teacher of a different race or having a teacher with low expectations for students who read below grade level.
- Instead of emphasizing families' economic and educational resources, successful theories will probably pay more attention to the way family members and friends interact with one another and with the outside world. A good explanation of why white four-year-olds have bigger vocabularies than black four-year-olds is likely to focus on how much parents talk to their children, how they deal with their children's questions, and how they react when their children either learn or fail to learn something, not on how much money the parents have in the bank.

Psychological and cultural differences are hard to describe accurately and therefore are easy to exaggerate. Collecting accurate data on such differences would require a massive investment of effort, perhaps comparable to what psychologists invested in developing cognitive tests during the first half of the twentieth century. It would also require far closer cooperation between psychologists, ethnographers, and survey researchers than one ordinarily sees in academic life.

CAN WE NARROW THE GAP?

We have argued that reducing the black-white test score gap would do more to move America toward racial equality than any politically plausible alternative. This argument rests on two problematic premises: first, that we know how to reduce the gap, and second, that the policies required to reduce the gap could command broad political support.

When readers try to assess what experts know, they should start by drawing a sharp distinction between policies that are expensive but easy to implement and policies that are cheap but hard to implement. (Most policies that are cheap, easy to implement, and clearly effective—like teaching children the alphabet or the multiplication tables—are already universal.) The two policies that seem to us most likely to combine effectiveness with ease of implementation are cutting class size and screening out semiliterate teachers. Cutting class size is clearly expensive. Selecting teachers with higher test scores would not be expensive in districts that now have more applicants than openings, but it would require higher salaries in many big cities.

When educators look for less expensive ways of raising black children's achievement, they usually find themselves considering proposals that are quite difficult to implement. Raising teachers' expectations is not inherently expensive, for example, but how does a school administrator do it? Big-city school districts are besieged by advocates of curricular innovation who claim their programs will raise black children's test scores. These programs usually require complex and relatively subtle changes in classroom practice. School boards and administrators cannot implement such changes by decree the way they can reduce class size or require new teachers to pass an exam. Nor can teachers make such changes by a single act of will, the way they might adopt a new textbook. As a result, schools seldom implement these programs in exactly the way their designers expected or intended. A program may work well initially, when it is closely supervised by a dedicated innovator, but may have no detectable effect when the innovator tries to bottle it and sell it "off the shelf."

Proposals for reducing the black-white test score gap also arouse passionate white resistance if they seem likely to lower white children's achievement. Both school desegregation and the elimination of academically selective classes often arouse such fears. School desegregation probably raises black elementary school students' reading scores. Whether it lowers white scores is unclear. But once black enrollment in a neighborhood school rises past something like 20 percent, white parents become reluctant to move into the neighborhood. If black enrollment remains low enough to keep whites comfortable, many blacks feel uncomfortable. There is no simple way out of this dilemma. It takes years of patient work to create stable, racially mixed schools with high black enrollments, and such schools remain unusual.

Experimental evidence, while limited, suggests that the struggle over ability grouping at the elementary level is largely symbolic: eliminating such classes would probably not do black children much good, and it would probably not do whites much harm either. At the secondary level, eliminating demanding courses seems ridiculous. We should be trying to get more black students to take such classes, not trying to eliminate them as an option for whites, who will respond by sending their children elsewhere. Any politically workable educational strategy for reducing the black-white test score gap has to promise some benefits for whites as well as blacks. Reducing class size, requiring higher levels of academic competence among teachers, and raising teachers' expectations for students who have trouble with schoolwork all meet this test.

Although we believe that improving the nation's schools could reduce the black-white test score gap, schools alone cannot eliminate the entire gap. To begin with, competition for educational resources is fierce. The typical American voter might accept a system of educational finance that gave schools with unusually disadvantaged students 10 or 20 percent more money per pupil than the average school. But few Americans would accept a system that gave disadvantaged schools 50 or 100 percent more money than the average school. If smaller classes in disadvantaged schools raise children's reading skills, for example, more affluent parents will want smaller classes too. In a system of school finance that relies heavily on local funding, affluent parents who want smaller classes will usually be able to get them. Even ensuring equal funding for black and white schools is a constant struggle. Creating a system in which black schools get far more money than white schools is politically inconceivable.

Even if resources were not a constraint, the cognitive disparities between black and white preschool children are currently so large that it is hard to imagine how schools alone could completely eliminate them. When three- and four-year-olds take vocabulary tests, for example, the typical black child's vocabulary score falls below the twentieth percentile of the national distribution. Relying entirely on educational reform to move such a child up to the fiftieth percentile does not strike us as realistic. If we want equal outcomes among twelfth graders, we will also have to narrow the skill gap between black and white children before they enter school.

Broadly speaking, there are two ways of raising three- and four-year-olds' cognitive skills: we can change their preschool experiences and we can change their home experiences. Changing preschools is less important but easier than changing homes. Black preschoolers are concentrated in Head Start. At present, Head Start does not emphasize teaching cognitive skills. Few Head Start teachers are trained to do this, and some oppose the idea on principle. A review of research on preschool effects by Steven Barnett, a professor of education at Rutgers, strongly suggests that cognitively oriented preschool programs can improve black children's achievement scores, even though the benefits fade somewhat as children age. Getting Head Start to emphasize cognitive development should therefore be a higher priority than merely expanding its enrollment.

Parenting practices almost certainly have more impact on children's cognitive development than preschool practices. Indeed, changing the way parents deal with their children may be the single most important thing we can do to improve children's cognitive skills. But getting parents to change their habits is even harder than getting teachers to change. Like teachers, parents are usually suspicious of unsolicited suggestions. This is doubly true when the suggestions require fundamental changes in a parent's behavior. But once parents become convinced that changing their behavior will really help their children, many try to change, even when this is quite difficult. As a practical matter, whites cannot tell black parents to change their practices without provoking charges of ethnocentrism, racism, and much else. But black parents are not the only ones who need help. We should be promoting better parenting practices for *all* parents, using every tool at our disposal, from Head Start outreach programs and home visits by nurses to television soap operas, sitcoms, or anything else that looks promising.

A successful strategy for raising black children's test scores will also include convincing both blacks and whites that the gap is not genetic in origin. This is not a simple task. Genetic variation does explain a substantial fraction of the variation in cognitive skills among people of the same race. So does environmental variation. But once hereditarianism percolates into popular culture, it can easily become an excuse for treating academic failure as an inescapable fact of nature. Teaching children skills that do not seem to "come naturally" is hard work. If our culture allows us to avoid such work by saying that a child simply lacks the required aptitude to master the skill, both teachers and parents will sometimes jump at this as an excuse for not trying. While this often makes everyone's life more pleasant in the short run, in the long run it is a formula for failure. Emphasizing heredity is likely to have especially negative consequences for African-American children, who start off behind white children and therefore need to work even harder than white children if they are to catch up.

The agenda we have sketched would not be easy to implement. We are not optimistic about expanding federal support for efforts of this kind. Popular distrust of federal education programs is now quite pervasive and shows no sign of receding. We are more optimistic about state and local efforts to narrow the black-white test score gap. Everyone recognizes that racial conflict is one of the nation's most pressing and persistent problems. Other strategies for dealing with this problem, which emphasize the use of racial preferences to overcome the adverse effects of discrimination, the test score gap, or both, are clearly in political trouble. Public support for efforts to narrow the test score gap, while tempered by suspicion that "nothing works," still seems fairly widespread. One reason is that the beneficiaries appear so deserving. Hardly anyone blames black first graders' limited vocabulary on defects of character or lack of ambition. First graders of every race seem eager to please. That was why Lyndon Johnson placed so much emphasis on helping children in his original War on Poverty.

We recognize that few readers will find our sketchy agenda for reducing the black-white test score gap entirely persuasive. Such skepticism is completely reasonable. While we are convinced that reducing the black-white test score gap is both necessary and possible, we do not have a detailed blueprint for achieving this goal—and neither does anyone else. The available research raises as many questions as it answers. This is partly because psychologists, sociologists, and educational researchers have devoted far less attention to the test score gap over the past quarter century than its political and social consequences warranted. Most social scientists have chosen safer topics and hoped the problem would go away. It didn't. We can do better.❑

U.S.A. Today, July 14, 1998

'High stakes' for students: Efforts to improve school standards come at a price

By Tamara Henry

COLUMBUS, Ohio -- You can see the fear and frustration in her eyes.

Kayeta Dye still doesn't have her high school diploma, even though the 18-year-old has completed all of her senior-year course work. She got better-than-average grades; she showed up every day for class.

But Kayeta can't quite master two of the four proficiency tests required by the state of Ohio -- so-called "high stakes," must-pass-to-graduate tests that she's taken nearly a dozen times over the past four years.

In Ohio and in 21 states nationwide, similar exams designed to raise the bar on academic achievement quietly are tripping up tens of thousands of students who used to get their diplomas without fanfare. Even more students may be denied a diploma in the future: a growing number of states are introducing high-stakes testing, and many states that already have them are making them tougher.

"I don't think it's fair," says Kayeta, who has weathered hot summer school lectures in a final attempt to pass the tests in math and citizenship this week. "If you have to go to school for the whole 12 years and then they throw a test in your face saying you have to pass to graduate, what's the use of going to school?"

What's raising concerns among some educators about high stakes tests is that these students are not dropouts in the traditional sense. Not only would most have graduated in the past, but some already had been accepted to college. Others had job offers and military enlistments contingent on passing the tests and receiving their diplomas.

"It's almost like a two-edged sword," says Rod Roscoe, principal of South High School, where Kayeta attended. "The school has to be accountable. We have to have a basic body of knowledge that everybody should learn. When you look at the stats on how many pass and don't pass, that's one thing. "But then when you get that one child that you've known since the ninth grade who comes to school, is a good person, a good school citizen and tries hard but can't get through the math portion of the test. I have mixed emotions about it. I really do."

Twenty South High students out of the 1998 class of 120 so far have failed the tests. Roscoe estimates 12 of them will pass in July.

Clearly, many politicians and parents ardently support high-stakes testing, arguing they are a weapon in the arsenal against "social promotion" that produces graduates without basic skills. And the vast majority of students do, in fact, pass them.

Many others, however, just as ardently fault the exams for everything from dubious educational value to discriminating against minorities to what they see as arbitrarily condemning late-bloomers to a convenience store instead of a career.

"A high school diploma now is a basic ticket into any form of productive life," says Linda Darling-Hammond of the National Center for Restructuring Education, Schools and Teaching, based at Columbia University's Teachers' College. "If someone doesn't know what the Lousiana Purchase was, does that mean they can't get and hold a job? Does that mean they should really be kept out of the labor market?"

Here in Columbus, an estimated 500 students have ended up in that predicament since the state program started in 1994. The same thing has happened in the past four years to about 10,000 students statewide. No one has an accurate count of how many students have failed high stakes tests nationally, but experts believe the number is easily into the tens of thousands of students -- possibly many more - since the tests began to be introduced in the 1980s.

Bert Wiser, director of testing and assessment for Columbus Public Schools, thinks the tests largely have had a positive impact on students and on teachers. But he, too, worries about what happens to kids who initially don't do well on the exams.

"My concern is this denial of graduation is creating a lot of pressure. We've lost thousands." He says unofficial district studies have found that students now tend to drop out of school earlier -- especially if they fail the tests a few times. "Your chances of getting from 9th to 12th grades have gone down," he says. "If you get to 12th, your chances of getting through have gone up."

In Florida, high stakes tests have been a requirement since 1982, but were recently made harder by the addition of algebra. A growing number of students -- nearly 3,000 -- failed them this year. That doesn't bother Stephen Stoloff, guidance director at South Broward High School in Hollywood.

"It's hard to feel too much compassion" for students who have failed the tests "because most of them don't take school seriously," Stoloff says.

Florida gives students who have completed course work but failed the tests a "certificate of completion," as opposed to a "diploma."

The certificates are "totally worthless," Stoloff says. "You are dead in the woods with a certificate of completion. All it says is you attended school for four years, case closed, good bye and good luck."

What happens to the kids who fail? If Kayeta Dye fails the test again this week, she plans to move to another state and take the 12th grade again -- without the humiliation of attending school with students who once were underclassmen.

"I'm tired of taking this test," says Kayeta, who works part-time at a salon. "This is too much stress."

Few options

Kayeta's friend, Charity Luckett, 18, is in the same situation: although she was not as regular a student as Kayeta, Charity completed her course work but can't pass the tests in math and citizenship. In May, Charity missed the required 200 points by one-half point in citizenship and by two points in math.

"This is the closest I've ever come to passing it," she says. ``I don't know what I'll do if I don't pass" this time. Her career options right now are to continue working in housekeeping at a local hotel. Her preference is to attend nearby Columbus State College.

When Charity and Kayeta learned they would not graduate, they were shattered. "I did everything" the other seniors did, says Kayeta, "except walk across the stage."

Shawn Edinger, 18, who attended Columbus' North High School, also should have graduated this spring. His future is on hold because he failed the math portion of the test.

It's a circumstance that has left him feeling angry and shortchanged because he was earning As and Bs by senior year. "I want to attend Columbus State to complete courses in law enforcement," says Shawn. This year, Shawn earned state certification for Ohio Peace Officers Training Commission, which allows him to work part-time for a private security firm. Now, though, nothing matters except passing the math test.

"I'm not giving up. I had a counselor who told me I should drop out and get my GED and just be done with it. But I'm going to get my diploma."

A GED doesn't have the prestige of a diploma, experts say, and doesn't carry the same weight with employers and college officials.

Students' stories are similar across the country. In Texas, which introduced high stakes exams in 1985, the tests tripped up Alfred Hicks, now 23, from Paris.

Hicks went to Paris High School, where he completed his classes and was a solid, though not exceptional, student. He was supposed to graduate in 1993. He took the three-part Texas Assessment of Academic Skills exam four times. Each time, he was stumped by the math.

Hicks wanted to join the U.S. Navy and had passed the qualifying tests. But everything was voided when he failed to pass the exams.

Hicks won't dwell on the fact that his school grades and enlistment tests were good enough for the U.S. Navy, but couldn't cut the mustard with the state.

"I'm not going to let that get me down," he says. Hicks now works at a Paris grocery store. Since he can no longer take the test, he plans to try next month for his GED so he can enroll at the Paris Community College this fall. That would help him advance, even at the grocery.

Setting higher standards

Today's high stakes tests were designed to prove that getting a diploma means a student can read and understand basic material, compute simple math problems, identify the U.S. Constitution and write concisely. Although the tests vary state to state, most of the material is at the eighth or ninth grade level.

According to a new report by The Center for Education Reform, a conservative think tank, more than 10 million Americans since 1983 learned to read at a basic level. More than 20 million have reached their senior year unable to do basic math, the report said, and almost 25 million don't know the basics of U.S. history. With graduation exit exams, the theory goes, that can't happen.

Those are among the reasons the tests were started in Ohio, where, in order to graduate, students must pass the Ninth Grade Proficiency Test that is given in writing, reading, math and citizenship. The tests, which soon will also require science, are a mixture of multiple choice, short answer and extended response.

State Sen. Eugene J. Watts, a conservative Republican, was a key author of the law who began pushing for stronger standards in 1987.

Watts says he tells PTA leaders and teachers, "You were graduating students with fourth grade reading levels and second grade math, giving them a diploma and turning them on the junk pile of life and saying you were doing a good job."

The tests were "not designed to punish students or to keep them from graduating," says Watts. As for students who barely miss passing the test, he says he's "very sympathetic. And yes, that's sad. But, of course, if we start making excuses again," poor performance will be the result.

There is, however; debate about whether testing improves education. Columbia's Darling-Hammond believes that, "in the long run, some of the evidence suggests that the quality of education has not improved much" with the tests.

And Monty Neill of The National Center for Fair & Open Testing, a Cambridge, Mass., advocacy group, believes the tests have a kind of "grade inflation" of their own. More students may be passing the tests, he says, but that doesn't necessarily mean overall learning has improved.

"If a test measures some things in a broad subject area, and the teacher teaches to the test, rather than to the broad domain, you end up with high scores on the test rather than if there was a fair representation of their knowledge of the domain," he says.

There is also concern about whether the tests discriminate. Court challenges to the high-stakes tests have been brought in more than a half dozen states, with cases in Texas and North Carolina focusing on whether they have a discriminatory impact on blacks and other minority groups. Other lawsuits are looking at lack of resources to prepare students in rural and urban communities. Results have been mixed, with rulings tilted more toward use of the tests.

No matter what the specifics of a particular test, questions about high-stakes testing continue to swirl.

"I think these tests are the ultimate of high stakes tests," says Albert Kauffman, regional counsel for the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, San Antonio, Texas. Students who do poorly on the SAT still have their grades considered by colleges, he notes. Students who fail the bar or medical exams "still can make a living."

But "without a high school diploma, you can't do anything," Kauffman says. "You are screwed. Almost nobody will give you a good job."

Commentary, September 1998

The War Against Testing

David W. Murray

It is safe to say that Thomas Jefferson never took a standardized test, and would probably consider them hopelessly inadequate as measures of what an educated person should know. Yet Jefferson, in his way, was the inspiration behind our present vast apparatus for assessing academic aptitude and achievement. Looking toward America's future, he imagined an educational system that would seek young people from "every condition of life," students of "virtue and talents" who would someday form a "natural aristocracy" to replace the old-fashioned kind based on wealth and family background.

The U.S. of course has never fully achieved this ideal. But particularly in the period after World War II, as ever larger numbers of Americans entered colleges and universities, Jefferson's educational vision did begin to appear closer than ever to being realized. To an extent unimaginable a few generations earlier, access to American universities, and especially the elite ones, became based on considerations of merit. The chief instrument of this transformation was the standardized test—mass-administered, machine-scored, and utterly indifferent to every characteristic of a student save his ability to get the answers right.

And yet, for all its obvious benefits in helping to identify Jefferson's "natural aristocracy," and for all its widespread acceptance—this year, the Educational Testing Service (ETS), the organization that does the bulk of such evaluation, will administer its tests to some nine million students—the enterprise of testing has never been free from criticism. Today, in fact, its critics are more numerous and more vociferous than ever.

Indignant over the recent drop in minority enrollment at some state universities as a result of bans on affirmative action, the foes of standardized assessment argue with bitterness that America's vaunted meritocracy has never served all its citizens equally well. As they see it, moreover, the real issue is not the abilities of the test-takers, minority or otherwise. Rather, it is the tests themselves, and the unreasonable emphasis placed on them by the gatekeepers of American higher education.

The oldest and most familiar accusation against standardized tests is that they are discriminatory. As the advocacy group FairTest puts it, a seemingly objective act, namely, "filling in little bubbles" with a No. 2 pencil, conceals a process that is "racially, culturally, and sexually biased."

The prime evidence for this charge is the test results themselves. For many years now, the median score for blacks on the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT) has fallen 200 points short of that for whites (on a scale of 400 to 1600, divided equally between math and verbal skills). Less dramatic, but no less upsetting to groups like the Center for Women's

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Policy Studies, has been the persistent 35-point gender gap in scores on the math section of the SAT.

The SAT produces such disparate results, say critics, because its very substance favors certain kinds of students over others. Thus, fully comprehending a reading selection might depend on background knowledge naturally available to an upper-middle-class white student (by virtue, say, of foreign travel or exposure to the performing arts) but just as naturally unavailable to a lower-class black student from the ghetto. The education writer Peter Sacks calls this the "Volvo effect," and has offered for proof an ETS study according to which, within certain income brackets, the difference between the test scores of white and black students disappears.

At the same time, women are said to be put at a disadvantage by the multiple-choice format itself. Singled out for blame are math questions that emphasize abstract reasoning and verbal exercises based on selecting antonyms, both of which supposedly favor masculine modes of thought. "[F]emales process and express knowledge differently, and more subtly," explains FairTest's Robert Schaeffer. "They look for nuances, shades of gray, different angles."

In fact, so biased are the tests, according to their opponents, that they fail to perform even the limited function claimed for them: forecasting future grades. The SAT, says Peter Sacks, consistently "underpredicts" the college marks of both women and minorities, which hardly inspires confidence in its ability to measure the skills it purports to identify. As for the Graduate Record Exam (GRE), required by most academic graduate programs, a recent study of 5,000 students found that their scores told us almost nothing, beyond what we might already know from their grades, about how they would perform in graduate school.

Another line of attack against the tests grants their accuracy in measuring certain academic skills but challenges the notion that these are the skills most worth having. High test scores, opponents insist, reveal little more than a talent for—taking tests. According to a 1994 study by the National Association of School Psychologists, students who do well on the SAT tend to think by "rote" and to favor a "surface approach" to schoolwork. Low scorers, by contrast, are more likely to delve into material, valuing "learning for its own sake."

It is likewise contended that no mere standardized test can capture the qualities that translate into real-world achievement. Thus, when it emerged last year that American children ranked dead last among the major industrial nations in the Third International Mathematics and Science Study, the Harvard education expert Howard Gardner declared himself unconcerned. The tests, after all, "don't measure whether students can think," just their exposure to "the lowest common denominator of facts and skills." Besides, Gardner observed, at a time when America enjoys unrivaled prosperity, what could be more obvious than that "high scores on these tests . . . aren't crucial to our economic success"?

In a similar vein, the social commentator Nicholas Lemann has called for a reassessment of what we mean by meritocracy. Our current view of it, he argued recently in the *New York Times*, is "badly warped." If universities are to regain the "moral and public dimensions" that once connected them to the wider society, instead of being mere instruments for "distributing money and prestige," they should begin to select not those students who excel on standardized tests but those with the skills necessary to lead "a good, decent life."

THIS VARIED chorus of critics has already won some significant concessions from the current testing regime. For one thing, ETS, faced with both adverse publicity and threats of legal action by activists and the U.S. Department of Education, has tried to remedy differences in group performance. On the Preliminary Scholastic Assessment Test (PSAT), which is used for choosing National Merit Scholars, a new method of scoring was recently introduced in the hope that more women might garner the prestigious award. The old formula, which assigned equal weight to the math and verbal sections of the test, was replaced by an index in which the verbal score, usually the higher one for female test-takers, was doubled. The point, as a prominent testing official put it, was "to help girls catch up."

More widely publicized was the massive "recentering" of SAT scores that went into effect with the 1996 results. Though the declared aim of ETS was a technical one—to create a better distribution of scores clustered around the test's numerical midpoint—the practical effect was a windfall for students in almost every range. A test-taker who previously would have received an excellent score of 730 out of 800 on the verbal section, for example, is now granted a "perfect" 800, while the average scores for groups like blacks and Hispanics have received a considerable boost.

But since neither "recentering" nor any other such device has succeeded in eliminating disparities in scores, opponents of tests have had to look elsewhere. At universities themselves, affirmative action has long been the tool of choice for remedying the alleged biases of tests. With racial preferences now under siege, economic disadvantage is being talked about as a new compensating factor that may help shore up the numbers of minority students. The law school at the University of California at Berkeley, for instance, has introduced a selection system that will consider a "coefficient of social disadvantage" in ranking applicants.

Some schools go farther, hoping simply to do away with standardized tests altogether. There are, they insist, other, less problematic indicators of student merit. High-school grades are a starting point, but no less important are essays, interviews, and work portfolios that offer a window into personal traits no standardized test can reveal.

Bates College in Maine, like several other small liberal-arts schools, has already stopped requiring applicants to take the SAT. According to the college's vice president, William Hiss, standardized scores are far less meaningful than "evidence of real intelligence, real drive, real creative abilities, real cultural sensitivities." These qualities, moreover, are said to be especially prominent in the applications of minority students, whose numbers at the school have indeed shot upward since the change in policy.

TAKEN AS a whole, the campaign currently being mounted against standardized testing constitutes a formidable challenge to what was once seen as the fairest means of identifying and ranking scholastic merit. Since that campaign shows every sign of intensifying in the years ahead, it may be relevant to point out that every major premise on which it rests is false.

In the first place, the SAT and GRE are hardly the meaningless academic snapshots described by their critics. Results from these tests have been shown to correspond with those on a whole range of other measures and outcomes, including IQ tests, the National Assessment of Educational Progress, and the National Educational Longitudinal Study. Though each of these uses a different format and has a somewhat different aim, a high degree of correlation obtains among all of them.

This holds true for racial and ethnic groups as well. Far from being idiosyncratic, the scoring patterns of whites, blacks, Hispanics, and Asians on the SAT and GRE are replicated on other tests as well. It was in light of just such facts that the National Academy of Science concluded in the 1980's that the most commonly used standardized tests display no evidence whatsoever of cultural bias.

Nor do the tests fail to predict how minority students will ultimately perform in the classroom. If, indeed, the purported bias in the tests were real, such students would earn better grades in college than what is suggested by their SAT scores; but that is not the case. As Keith Widaman, a psychologist at the University of California, showed in a recent study, the SAT actually *over*estimates the first-year grades of blacks and Hispanics in the UC system.

Foes of testing are a bit closer to the mark when they claim that women end up doing better in college than their scores would indicate. But the "underprediction" is very slight—a tenth of a grade point on the four-point scale—and only applies to less demanding schools. For more selective institutions, the SAT predicts the grades of both sexes quite accurately.

As for the claim that test scores depend heavily on income, the facts again tell us otherwise. Though one can always point to exceptions, students who are not of the same race but whose families earn alike tend, on average, to perform very differently. A California study found, for example, that even among families with annual incomes over $70,000, blacks still fell short in median SAT scores, trailing Hispanics by 79 points, whites by 148 points, and Asians by 193 points.

This suggests that universities turning to economic disadvantage as a surrogate for racial preferences will be disappointed with the results. And this has already proved to be the case. When the University of Texas medical school mounted such an effort, it found that most of its minority applicants did not qualify for admission, coming as they did from fairly comfortable circumstances but still failing to match the academic credentials of less-well-off whites and others. In fact, as a University of California task force concluded last year, so-called economic affirmative action, by opening the door to poor but relatively high-scoring whites and Asians, might actually *hurt* the prospects of middle-class blacks and Hispanics.

WHAT ABOUT relying less on tests and more on other measuring rods like high-school grades? Unfortunately, as everyone knows, high schools across the country vary considerably, not only in their resources but in the demands they make of students. An A- from suburban Virginia's elite Thomas Jefferson High School of Science and

Technology cannot be ranked with an A- from a school in rural Idaho or inner-city Newark, especially at a time of rampant grade inflation aimed at bolstering "self-esteem." It was precisely to address this problem that a single nationwide test was introduced in the first place.

Nor is it even clear that relying more exclusively on grades would bump up the enrollment numbers of blacks and Hispanics, as many seem to think. While it is true that more minority students would thereby become eligible for admission, so would other students whose grade-point averages (GPA's) outstripped their test scores. A state commission in California, considering the adoption of such a scheme, discovered that in order to pick students from this larger pool for the limited number of places in the state university system, the schools would have to raise their GPA cut-off point. As a result, the percentage of eligible Hispanics would have remained the same, and black eligibility actually would have dropped.

In Texas, vast disparities in preparation have already damped enthusiasm for a much-publicized "top-10-percent" plan under which the highest-ranking tenth of graduates from any Texas high school win automatic admission to the state campus of their choice, regardless of their test scores. Passed in the wake of the 1996 *Hopwood* case (1996), which scuttled the state university's affirmative-action program, the plan has forced many high schools to discourage their students from getting in over their heads when choosing a college. As one guidance counselor quoted in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* warned her top seniors, "You may be sitting in a classroom where the majority of students have demonstrated . . . higher-order thinking skills that are beyond what you have. You'll have to struggle."

Grades aside, what of the various less measurable signs of student potential? Should not a sterling character or artistic sensitivity count for something? What of special obstacles overcome?

Certainly, such things should count, and always have counted—more so today than ever, to judge by the sorts of questions most schools currently ask of applicants. But gaining a fuller picture of a particular student's promise is a difficult business, especially in an admissions process that very often involves sorting through thousands of individuals. Moreover, it can only go so far before it ceases to have anything to do with education. What a student is like outside the classroom is surely significant, but until we are prepared to say outright that the heart of the matter is something other than fitness for academic work, a crucial gauge of whether a student is going to be able to pass a biology final or write a political-science research paper will remain that old, much-maligned SAT score.

THERE ARE, to be fair, social commentators who acknowledge this ineluctable fact, and who therefore urge us to direct all our remedial efforts toward improving the test scores of American blacks.* But for the true opponents of testing, such efforts—the work of generations—are clearly beside the point. Basically, what these critics are hoping to do is to achieve the ends of affirmative action by other, more politic means.

Hence the search for supposedly more "nuanced" measures of scholastic merit like "creativity" and "leadership," tacitly understood as stand-ins for skin color. But there is no reason to think that minority students possess these qualities in greater abundance than do their peers. The attempt to substitute them for test scores will thus only perpetuate the corrupt logic of affirmative action by piling deception upon deception.

Whatever the euphemism used to describe it, only counting by race and gender can produce the result that will satisfy the most determined critics of standardized testing. If they have their way, and such testing wholly or partly disappears, we will have forfeited our best and most objective means of knowing how our schools are doing, as well as any clear set of standards by which students themselves can judge their own progress. On that day, America's astonishingly successful experiment in educational meritocracy will have come to an end. How this will benefit the poor and disadvantaged among us, or help them get ahead, is anybody's guess.

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* See "America's Next Achievement Test" by Christopher Jencks and Meredith Phillips in the September-October *American Prospect*.

The New Republic, June 15, 1998

A TRUE TEST

By Adrian Wooldridge

Question: On average, blacks and Latinos score well below whites and Asians on the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT). What should we do about this? *(a)* Take race into account when considering test scores. *(b)* Allow blacks and Latinos to go underrepresented, as a proportion of the population, on elite campuses. *(c)* Scrap the tests. *(d)* Overhaul our educational system from the bottom up

Until recently, of course, the answer of most college admissions offices was *(a)*. But in November 1996 California voters decided to declare that answer unconstitutional when they passed Proposition 209, banning affirmative action. Ever since then a vocal group of Californian academics and activists has been arguing for replacing *(a)* with *(c)*, in order to maintain levels of minority admissions to the state university system.

To be sure, it's not the first time the SAT has come under fire. For the past 35 years there has been no shortage of people who think that standardized tests are the work of the devil: Marxists who regard them as instruments of class segregation, postmodernists who ridicule them for making naïve distinctions between "right" and "wrong," and, most important of all, ethnic activists who argue that they are suffused with white middle-class values.

But Proposition 209 has provided the anti-testing movement with a new cause—and a new legitimacy. Last September, for example, the University of California's Latino Eligibility Task Force proposed disregarding SAT scores in university admissions entirely in order to counteract the effects of abolishing affirmative action. So far the university has resisted such moves, but the university's president, Richard Atkinson, has pronounced the idea "intriguing." And the anti-testers, led by Eugene Garcia, the dean of Berkeley's School of Education, continue their agitation.

Garcia and his allies have undoubtedly hit on a subject that worries opponents and supporters of affirmative action alike: the huge gap between the average SAT scores of whites, on the one hand, and Latinos and blacks on the other. In 1995, for example, only one black student scored 750 or above on the mathematics portion of the SAT for every 89 whites. Even Ward Connerly, the architect of Proposition 209, briefly welcomed the idea of scrapping the SAT.

In picking on the SAT, the anti-testers have also found a particularly vulnerable target. Apart, of course, from the companies that make millions of dollars out of devising and administering them, nobody much likes tests that reduce knowledge to a set of isolated facts, ripped out of context and divorced from interpretation; turn reasoning into a mechanical exercise in ticking boxes; and drive a fair number of the million or so people who take them each year to despair.

The people who design these tests argue that all this is a price worth paying because the SAT is much more objective than other forms of assessment. Yet it's no great secret that you can boost your SAT score substantially by cramming—nor is it any great secret that minorities and the poor lack the resources to take advantage of classes that provide the most useful cramming. What's more, a good SAT score is hardly a guarantee of academic success. In studies of several hundred colleges, the correlation between test scores and freshman GPAs was only in the range of 0.42 to 0.48.

Some of the anti-testers are populists who are opposed to introducing any system of rationing into the elysian world of the American campus. Some are know-nothings who believe that, since all forms of testing are fallible, we might as well distribute university places by lottery. But there are more persuasive reformers, too, and they base their arguments not on the evils of selection in general but on the particular ills of the SAT. All they want to do, they argue, is to devise a more sophisticated system of selection: one that gives students more of a chance to express their intellectual talents and creative powers than these multiple-choice monstrosities.

Ah, if only it were that easy. One obvious problem with this critique is that it rests on an exaggerated view of how blindly and exclusively public universities rely on the SAT. SATs are primarily used as screening devices at highly competitive institutions such as Berkeley. Most prospective students can get into lesser institutions almost regardless of their SAT scores. And the most exclusive universities use the SAT alongside a range of other indicators, such as grade-point averages (GPAs), standardized achievement tests (which are designed by the same company that administers the SAT and test knowledge in specific subjects, like history or math), teacher recommendations, and other school records.

The real question, then, is what role SATs should play in the mixture of tests that are used to decide who gets into elite universities. And the problem facing the SAT's critics is that putting less weight on these tests could end up making the already fraught system even worse than it is at the moment.

To succeed in the peculiar conditions of American higher education, selection systems must have two attributes. First, they must be susceptible to mass production. At Oxford, for example, the selection system avoided the most obvious defects of the SAT. Candidates wrote large numbers of one-hour essays; their prospective teachers spent days pouring over their manuscripts; and what mattered was the quality of the arguments rather than the mere ability to regurgitate facts.

But applying that model in the United States would be difficult. Oxford sits on the top of a ruthlessly selective system of education that sorts people into streams early in life and devotes a disproportionate amount of public resources to grooming the elite. In the United States, with its emphasis on providing everybody with second chances, such a system would be impossible. The University of California, which selects more than 25,000 students each year, has no choice but to reduce selection to something of a routine. Essays and projects will inevitably end up being evaluated by admissions officers according to one predetermined formula or another.

The second requirement of selection systems is that they must appear as objective as possible, relying on precise measurement rather than fine judgment. In a country as ethnically divided and litigious as the United States, universities need to be able to point to value-free measures in order to minimize strife. The Oxford dons who pronounce mystically on whether a candidate possesses "a trace of alpha" would soon create a backlash in the United States—particularly since such a large number of those who show up favorably on the alpha detectors turn out to be Old Etonians.

To be sure, an alternative system could involve a more fine-tuned standardized examination instead of a group of professors scrutinizing essays. But there is no obvious reason to believe that more sophisticated tests would be more likely to favor underrepresented minorities than the SAT. Why should somebody who has never been taught about Archduke Ferdinand suddenly blossom when asked to write an essay on the origins of World War I? The only way to stop children of privilege from pulling still further ahead under such a system would be to rig it in favor of minorities—by awarding extra marks to candidates who bring a "different perspective" to their work or maybe by asking questions less dependent on specific areas of knowledge.

But students who lost out as a result of such rigging would be unlikely to stay quiet. A more sophisticated selection system might rapidly degenerate into a game of power politics, in which vocal pressure groups agitate for their definitions of merit to prevail and in which recourse to the courts becomes routine. The left would give high marks for self-expression (particularly if the self being expressed had been touched by suffering or shaped by social exclusion); the right would counter that what matters is knowledge of traditional academic subjects; and the nation's campuses would be torn apart by a culture war that would make today's guerrilla skirmishes look benign.

Because of these manifold problems, the critics of the SAT are being forced to resort, for practical purposes, to more mundane measures of promise, such as class ranking and GPA. Yet there is little reason to think that these devices will do anything to improve the fortunes of racial minorities. In 1995, almost twice as many white students as black ranked in the top tenth of their class, according to the College Entrance Examination Board. Only eight percent of black students had an "A" average compared with 21 percent of whites and 27 percent of Asians.

Indeed, when the University of California looked into the implications of abolishing the SAT, it found that the impact on the racial composition of the university would be mixed: The number of Latinos eligible for places would rise by five percent, but the number of blacks eligible would decline by 18 percent. Fourteen percent more whites would qualify for places, while the number of eligible Asians would fall.

These alternatives are also less reliable than the SAT. A recent study by the Educational Testing Service found that SATs are better than high school GPAs in predicting freshman grades in nearly all subjects. By the same token, the Law School Admissions Test—the LSAT—seems to be a substantially better predictor of first-year performance in law school than undergraduate GPA.

GPAs have always been unreliable indicators because different schools use different grading systems. And, even within schools, different teachers grade according to different standards. A 1994 study by the Department of Education, for example, found that students receiving an "A minus" in schools in impoverished areas might well have received a "C" or "D" in schools in more affluent areas. GPAs are getting steadily less reliable, too, because of the impact of grade inflation. The percentage of college-bound seniors reporting an "A" average increased from 28 percent in 1987 to 37 percent a decade later, and this inflation is only likely to get worse if universities start giving more weight to school grades. Judging students by their GPAs will inevitably involve admission officers in judging the reliability of schools as much as the promise of their graduates, a process that is unlikely to redound to the advantage of the inner cities.

Another alternative is to provide automatic admission for the top performers in each school. This has the advantage of measuring children against competitors from similar backgrounds. It also eliminates one of the most obvious biases from the old system of affirmative action: the fact that the children of black lawyers get an automatic advantage over the children of white valet-parkers, since nowadays school population is more segregated by class than by race.

This solution has been adopted by the University of Texas, which has scrapped affirmative action but substituted a system that automatically admits the top ten percent of students in each high school, regardless of SAT scores, into the state's public university system. Advocates of this system such as Lani Guinier, who sang Texas's praises in a recent *New York Times* op-ed, claim it will actually boost minority enrollment beyond levels affirmative action produced.

But, even if true, there are two big problems with this scheme. First, it further reduces pressure on schools to improve their performance: If lousy schools send graduates to the best universities, why should they strive to teach better? Second, this scheme would force even more ill-prepared students into elite universities than affirmative action did. Under such a system, the alumni of South Central's sink schools will eventually have to compete with the alumni of Lowell High. They will just do it when they get to Berkeley, where the pressure is intense and the possibilities of remedial teaching are minimal, rather than when they are trying to get into a university.

What makes this whole exercise so ironic, of course, is the fact that, until very recently, standardized testing was an instrument of upward mobility—and not a barrier to opportunity. Napoleon used tests to introduce the aristocrat-destroying principle of a "career open to the talents." British Whigs such as Macaulay and Trevelyan used tests to open Oxbridge and the civil service, hitherto playgrounds for the idle rich, to lower-class meritocrats.

In the United States, testing played a vital role in forcing the WASP-dominated Ivy Leagues to admit Jews and white ethnics—and then blacks, Asians, and Hispanics. When, in 1933, Harvard's President James Bryant Conant launched a revolutionary scholarship program that awarded money solely on the basis of academic promise, the person he employed to detect that promise was Henry Chauncey, who later went on to found the Educational Testing Service. During a 1955 Supreme Court hearing to debate ways of implementing *Brown* v. *Board of Education*, Thurgood Marshall, then a lawyer for the NAACP, relied on testing to explode the segregationist argument that the average black child was so far behind the average white that it made no sense to educate them in the same schools. Why not test all children, black as well as white, he argued, and educate them according to their test results rather than by the color of their skin?

Real conservatives have always regarded tests as tools of subversion. T.S. Eliot, for example, argued that "a vast calculating machine that would automatically sort out each generation afresh according to a culture index of each child" would "disorganize society and debase education." Perhaps the oddest thing about the current debate on testing is the way that the contemporary left, corrupted by identity politics, Foucault-chic, and entitlement mania, has turned against what ought to be one of its most powerful tools.

True, yesterday's conservatives opposed tests because they admitted too many members of minority groups, while today's liberals oppose them because they admit too few. But these liberals should remember that pendulums swing. If they can rig the selection process one way, their successors will be able to rig it another. They should also remember that choosing students for elite education is not like choosing guests for a dinner party. One of the glories of the testing movement is that it has taken selection out of the hands of academic patrons, with their weakness for passing fads, and forced it to become a little more rigorous.

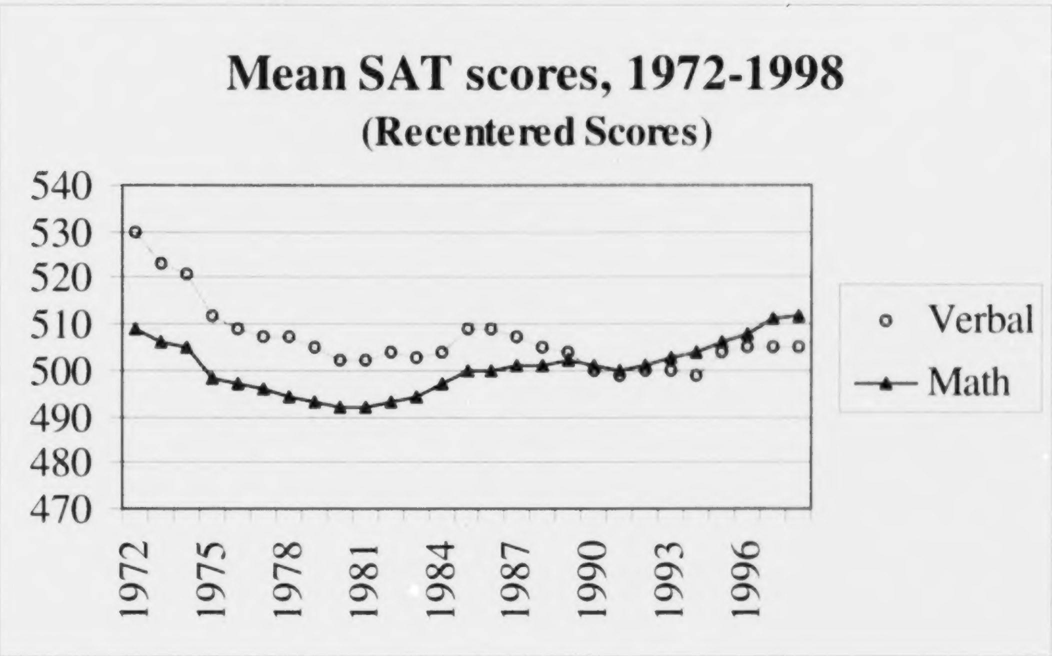
Tests do more than just provide opportunities for the deserving. They provide vital information about how both schools and pupils are doing. This allows students to take corrective action and make informed choices. It also allows society to judge the performance of its educational institutions—and to put pressure on them if they seem to be failing in their basic tasks. For all their imperfections, standardized tests are probably the most powerful instruments of accountability in education that America has.

The word "information" here is crucial. The great merit of tests is that they provide us with relatively objective information about both individuals and institutions—and the great disgrace at the heart of the anti-testing movement is that it is trying to conceal information that it regards as unpalatable. What makes this even sadder is that tests are getting ever better at spotting and diagnosing learning difficulties as they unfold.

If anything, the real problem with the SAT is that we use them too little and too late. We have relegated them to the depressing role of eliminating students who are not up to scratch, rather than using them to diagnose and eliminate learning difficulties as they emerge. What we need is more testing rather than less—and more willingness to act on the results of those tests so that the poor of whatever race are no longer given such a rotten deal by America's schools. •

ADRIAN WOOLDRIDGE is West Coast correspondent of *The Economist* and the author of *Measuring the Mind: Education and Psychology in England, 1860 to 1990* (Cambridge University Press).

What do the 1998 SAT scores really show?



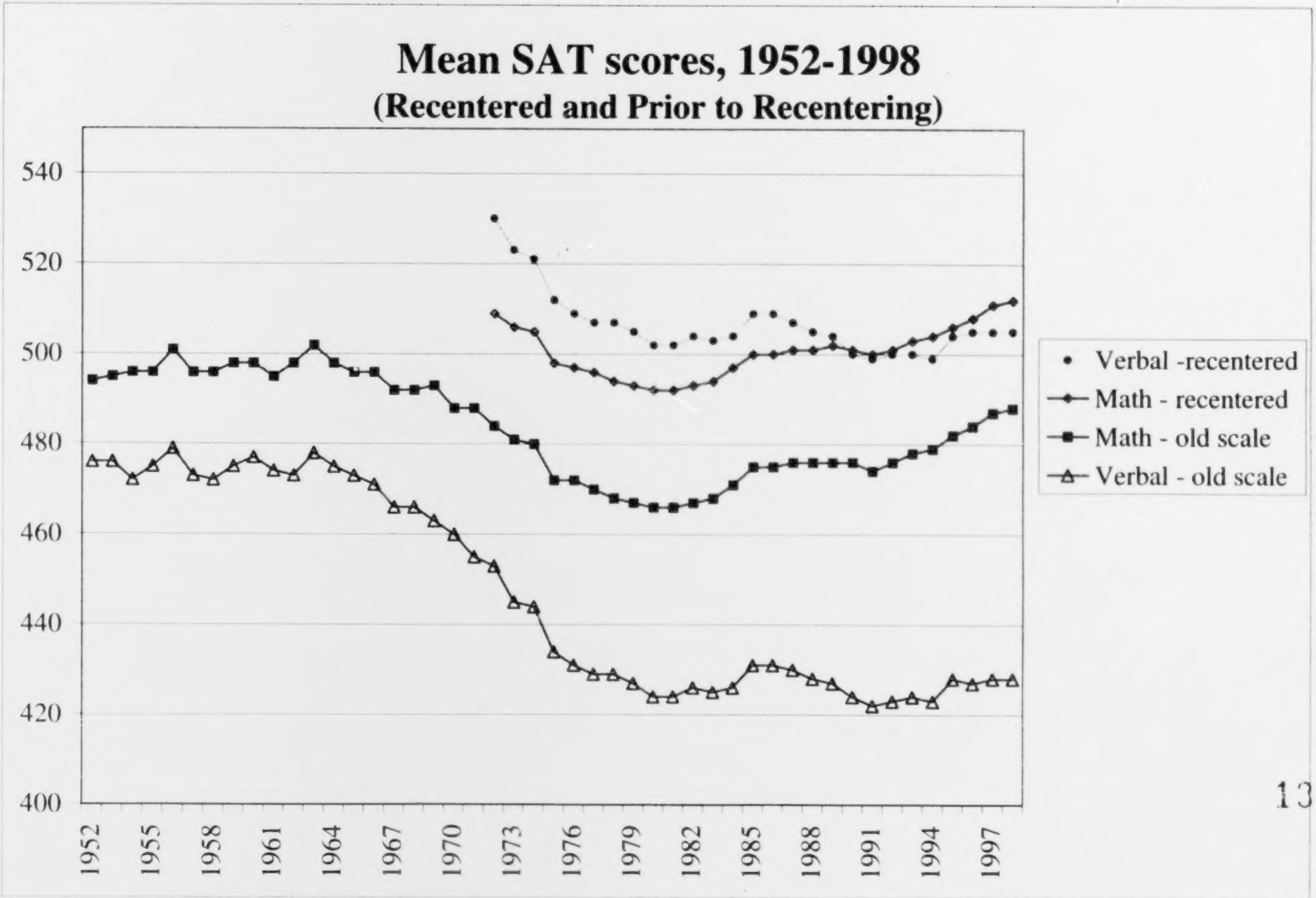
When the 1998 SAT scores were released this July, no one was sure what to make of them. "SAT results send mixed message," "Raising math scores raise hope as verbal tallies go opposite way," and "Read more into SAT results than just the average scores," were all headlines spotted in major newspapers.

The reaction to the scores might have been more solidly negative if the 1998 scores had been shown in historical context, but it is no longer so easy to do this. When the College Board began reporting recentered SAT scores in 1996, they not only made everyone's scores look better, they also made it harder to see how fresh scores look compared with long-term trends.

To save our readers the trouble of converting the new SAT scores to the old scale themselves, we've done the work for you using scores, conversion charts, and information on the standard deviation of recent scores (which is necessary to perform the conversion) graciously provided by the College Board.

The chart on this page shows the recently released scores in the context of other recent scores (which have all been recentered).

The chart on the facing page shows what the new scores and other recent scores look like when they are converted back to the old scale and viewed in the context of historical trends.



Mean SAT scores, 1952-1998

(Recentered and Prior to Recentering)

The New York Times, September 2, 1998

S.A.T. Scores Decline Even as Grades Rise

College Board Initiates Study on Inflated Marks in High School

By WILLIAM H. HONAN

Calling it evidence of persistent grade inflation in American high schools, College Board officials said yesterday that more college-bound students had A averages than a decade ago but that they scored lower on their S.A.T. exams.

The College Board, which sponsors the S.A.T., said that test takers with A averages grew from 28 percent of the total to 38 percent in the last 10 years, but the S.A.T. scores of those students fell an average of 12 points on the verbal portion and 3 points on the math portion.

The disparity between grades and the S.A.T., the nation's leading standardized college entrance test, is sufficiently troubling that the president of the College Board, Donald M. Stewart, said the organization has commissioned a study of the issue by Rand. the research institution.

"We don't know why grades are rising," Mr. Stewart said. "The trend may reflect positive changes in education, but it may also reflect greater focus on personal qualities instead of academic achievement."

Over all, S.A.T. scores remained about the same this year as last: 512 on the math portion, a point above last year and the highest in 27 years, and 505 on the verbal portion, the same as last year. The figures were released yesterday in the College Board's annual report on the 1.2 million students who took the S.A.T. before they graduated from high school last spring.

The board also reported that substantially greater numbers of high school students were taking the test and that more were enrolled in advanced placement courses, making them eligible for college credit before enrollment.

Mr. Stewart said the scores revealed two troubling trends. One is that suburban students are improving their S.A.T. scores, while urban and rural students are falling further behind, with a 30-point gap between urban and suburban students.

"This growing disparity is particularly troublesome," Mr. Stewart said, "because 40 to 50 percent of African-American and Latino students who take the S.A.T. live in large cities."

KEEPING TRACK

Suspicious Growth of A's

More college-bound high school students in the United States are getting A's than 10 years ago but are also scoring lower on S.A.T.'s.

GRADE AVERAGE	PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS GETTING GRADES 1988	1998	AVERAGE S.A.T. SCORES VERBAL 1988	1998	MATH 1988	1998
A+	4%	7%	625	613	632	629
A	11	15	582	569	586	582
A–	13	16	554	542	556	554
B	53	48	495	483	490	487
C	19	13	442	430	431	428

Source: The College Board

Also, the S.A.T. scores of the children of parents with less education are falling further below the national average, the report said.

These conclusions were based on the College Board's analysis of the 1.2 million seniors who took the SAT1: Reasoning Test, and the 321,000 who took college-level Advanced Placement Examinations before they graduated from high school last June.

The evidence of continuing grade inflation comes at a time when many states are requiring schools to adopt higher standards, though sometimes grading the students on the basis of portfolios of their work.

"More subjectivity is going into assessments," Mr. Stewart said. "This also could be the result of the increased emphasis on accountability by teachers. That is, since teachers are supposed to be teaching better they are giving out phony grades in an unconscious effort to show themselves well — something that is exploded by the S.A.T. tests."

Bob Schaeffer, a spokesman for Fairtest, a longtime critic of testing services, warned that the prevalence of grade inflation should not be taken as an argument that the S.A.T. "keeps the process honest." He said that proponents of the S.A.T. "admit that high school performance is a better predictor of how someone will do at college than is the S.A.T."

Bob Chase, president of the National Education Association, the nation's largest union with 2.4 million members, cautioned against blaming teachers for grade inflation. "If it's happening," he said, "no one could be supportive of that, but it may result from pressures from both parents and the schools. We just don't know."

Seppy Basili, a spokesman for Kaplan Educational Centers, the largest test preparation company in the nation, said "grade inflation is here to stay," and may be explained in part by the popularity of advanced-placement courses. "Students who do well in A.P. courses may receive a weighted grade which is higher than an A," he said.

Howard Everson, the College Board's chief research scientist, said that the increased number of students taking the test is "good news for the nation."

"It shows that there is a growing cohort of those who aspire to attend a competitive college," he said.

Mr. Basili attributed the rise in math scores over the last four years to a rule change that permitted students to bring along their calculators when taking the test.

"Having their calculators made them feel comfortable, and helped them to avoid making sloppy mistakes," Mr. Basili said.

Mr. Stewart also said that even though there were growing gaps in the scores of urban and suburban students, there was relatively good news for minorities. "Despite the recent backlash against affirmative action, racial and ethnic minorities continue to see college as the route to a better life," he said. "This year, minority students are a record one-third of the S.A.T. population and 28 percent of AP graduates, and more of them aspire to master's and Ph.D. degrees."

Ward Connerly, a black trustee of the University of California who has long opposed affirmative action, said he sees the increased number of racial and ethnic minorities who take the test as a welcome indication of their growing confidence.

"What this really represents is that with the demise of preferences in California and Texas, and soon the entire nation, blacks and Latinos are beginning to realize that they can make it without preferences," Mr. Connerly said.

A troubling trend that defies easy explanation.

Mr. Stewart faulted Mr. Connerly for failing to seek an alternative to affirmative action to equalize opportunity. Mr. Stewart said he, too, would oppose preferences, "but only if we can find a way to create equal educational opportunity."

In another trend reflected in this year's tests, many students' career aspirations seemed out of step with the prospect for jobs in the years ahead. Student test takers were asked to check off on questionnaires the careers they hope to pursue. Labor Department projections indicate that the top three occupations expected to grow most rapidly between now and 2006 are computer-related. Yet relatively few students (5 percent) checked off computing and information sciences.

Students' first career choice was health and allied services (18 percent), followed by business and commerce (14 percent) and social sciences and history (11 percent).

The S.A.T. was taken by 43 percent of all high school graduates, or about 1.2 million students.

The College Board is the nonprofit educational association that sponsors the S.A.T., which is developed and administered by the Educational Testing Service. The S.A.T. is the dominant test on the Atlantic and Pacific coasts. The A.C.T. is more popular in the central United States.

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Selected Readings on School Reform

Teacher Talent

The saga of the Massachusetts teacher certification test, in which some 60% of aspiring Bay State teachers failed to pass the new state certification exam, sent shock waves through the nation's newspapers and journals. We have selected several of the more interesting reactions and explanations.

John Leo blasts schools of education in his article, "Dumbing Down Teachers," which appeared in *U.S. News and World Report*. Leo contends that education schools focus more on multiculturalism—emphasizing diversity, personal feelings, and the self—than on academic content. Instead of making future teachers endure such programs, he suggests, certification should require teachers to demonstrate competence and permit many alternative routes into the classroom.

Diane Ravitch offers a "Lesson Plan for Teachers" in a recent *Washington Post* column. Concerned by the large number of "out-of-field" teachers, Ravitch asserts that teacher hopefuls should earn a degree in the subject they want to teach. Sounds like common sense to us, though few states require it.

Eugene W. Hickock, Pennsylvania's Secretary of Education, joins the debate with his *Policy Review* article entitled "Higher Standards for Teacher Training." Hickock summarizes new standards that education schools in Pennsylvania will have to meet in order to maintain their accreditation. He also outlines tougher requirements for prospective teachers. Students who hope to enter teaching will now be subject to more rigorous admission standards, subject-oriented curricula, and qualifying tests.

Meanwhile back in Massachusetts, the State Board of Education has acted decisively. As chronicled in Jordana Hart's article, "State Plan Would Decertify Lagging Teacher Programs," from *The Boston Globe,* the Board unanimously okayed the decertification of programs that fail to pass eighty percent of their students through state exams. Although the policy is still open to debate and final approval, we offer the article with the hope that other states may want to follow the Bay State's example.

The question of education school accreditation also surfaced in Texas recently. Kathy Walt's article "Ratings Sting Teacher Programs," which appeared in *The Houston Chronicle*, examines the results of the state's first-ever accountability ratings for ed schools. Much as in Massachusetts, approximately forty percent of the state's education schools failed to meet the mark. Complicating the picture is that many of these low institutional ratings were due chiefly to the performance of minority students. This poses a painful dilemma: which is more important, diversity in the teaching force or the subject-matter competency of the teachers?

The final entry in this section steps away from the issue of bringing quality teachers into classrooms and looks at what's entailed in getting bad ones out. Peter Schweizer, in his *National Review* article, "Firing Offenses," criticizes teachers' unions for continually backing bad teachers, leading to lengthy dismissal hearings at taxpayers' expense.

SMF

U.S News & World Report, August 3, 1998

Dumbing Down Teachers

By John Leo

A reader sent in a list of teacher-education courses at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst, along with a note: "This explains why 59 percent of prospective teachers in Massachusetts flunked a basic literacy test." The courses listed were: "Leadership in Changing Times," "Social Diversity in Education" (four different courses), "Embracing Diversity," "Diversity & Change," "Oppression & Education," "Introduction to Multicultural Education," "Black Identity," "Classism," "Racism," "Sexism," "Jewish Oppression," "Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual Oppression," "Oppression of the Disabled," and (get this one) "Erroneous Beliefs."

The reader was referring to a basic 10th-grade test in language, math, and other subjects, given to 1,800 would-be teachers in Massachusetts. Among other things, the 59 percent who failed often couldn't spell simple English words like "burned" and "abolished." Apparently they went into ed school without knowing much about anything, then came out the same way. But at least they are prepared to drill children in separatism, oppression, and erroneous beliefs.

Our schools of education have been a national scandal for many years, but it's odd that they are rarely front-and-center in our endless debate about failing schools. The right talks about striving and standards, the left talks about equal funding and classroom size, but few talk much about the breeding grounds for school failure-the trendy, anti-achievement, oppression-obsessed, feel-good, esteem-ridden, content-free schools of education.

For an article in City Journal, journalist Heather Mac Donald recently visited New York's City College to see how a modern education school manages to fill its class time without making the dread, professional mistake of having any actual content or clear purpose. She found a teacher talking about "building a community, rich of talk" and how ed-school students should "develop the subtext of what they are doing." Each student wrote for seven minutes on "What excites me about teaching," "What concerns me about teaching," and "What was it like to do this writing?" After their writings were read aloud, the teacher said, "So writing gave you permission to think on paper about what's there."

Stupid is as stupid does. Then the students split into small groups and talked about their feelings. "It shifted the comfort zone," said one student, already fluent in ed-speak. Another said: "I felt really comfortable. I had trust there." "Let's talk about that," said the teacher. "We are building trust in this class." But what they were not doing was talking about anything in the real world, or about how to teach real lessons to real children. The credo for ed schools, Mac Donald says, is "Anything but Knowledge." "Once you dismiss real knowledge as the goal of education," she writes about the make-work silliness in ed classes, "you have to find something else to do."

The education schools take for granted that education must be "child centered," which means that children decide for themselves what they want to learn. Heavy emphasis is put on feelings and the self. An actual curriculum, listing things students ought to know, is viewed as cramping the human spirit. Ed-school students are taught to be suspicious of authority and the notion that teachers might be expected to know more than the children they teach, so the word "teacher" is in decline. The fad word is now "facilitator," part guide and part bystander watching the self-educating child.

The traditional ed-school hostility to achievement currently hides behind the word "equity"-bright students must be tamped down so slower learners will not feel bad about themselves. Smuggled in along with equality is the notion that performance and learning shouldn't really count-they elevate some children at the expense of others. Grades and marks are bad, too, because they characterize and divide children. The result is that the brighter students get little help and are often the target of teacher resentment. Rita Kramer in her 1991 study of education schools, Ed School Follies, wrote: "What happens to those more capable or motivated students is hardly anyone's concern."

This lack of concern for achievement now has a racial cast. Asian and white children are often depicted as somehow out of step if they work harder and achieve more than blacks, Hispanics, and other minorities. Instead of working hard with children to reduce the racial gap, ed-school theory calls for strategies to conceal it under group projects or simply to demonstrate that achievement doesn't matter.

Various experiments are underway to let bright college graduates bypass education schools. Connecticut has a program allowing graduates to switch into teaching from other careers simply by taking an eight-week summer course and a test. In New York, the Teach for America program produced a sudden infusion of very good teachers into public schools, also by bypassing the ed-school swamp. But the hidebound education industry is digging in to close these loopholes and protect its closed-shop monopoly. It makes no sense to force teachers through schools as bad as these. People should be able to qualify as teachers simply by passing rigorous tests in their area of competence. Scrapping the ed-school requirement is clearly the way to go.

The Washington Post, August 10, 1998

Lesson Plan For Teachers by Diane Ravitch

Here is a bold policy prescription to improve the quality of teaching: Require future high school teachers to have an academic major in the subject they intend to teach. Thirty states claim to do it now, though there are plenty of loopholes. Future teachers of history should major in history, and future teachers of science should major in science. Those who plan to teach the nation's children should themselves be well educated.

This may not sound controversial, but in fact it is too controversial for Congress. When Sen. Jeff Bingaman (D-N.M.) proposed recently that states and institutions receiving federal funds should adopt a policy of this kind, his colleagues on both sides of the political divide objected. The Republicans, not surprisingly, did not like the idea that the federal government should tell states how to prepare future teachers; much to everyone's surprise, Democratic senators—led by Sen. Ted Kennedy—wondered if it was altogether fitting for the federal government to tell states how to improve the quality of future teachers.

Bingaman, with co-sponsors Thad Cochran (R-Miss), Harry Reid (D-Nev.) and Ernest Hollings (D-S.C.), is trying to amend the Higher Education Act, and he is on the right track. Presently, there are two great scandals in teaching. The first is that huge numbers of teachers are teaching subjects in which they have neither a college major nor a minor. The U.S. Department of Education calls them "out of field" teachers. Fully 39.5 percent of those whose main teaching assignment is science have neither a major nor minor in science; 34 percent of mathematics teachers are "out of field," as are 25 percent of English teachers and 55 percent of history teachers. The proportions of "out of field" teachers approach 50 percent in inner-city schools. Despite these numbers, nearly all public school teachers are "certified," even when they are teaching a subject in which they have neither a college major nor minor nor graduate degree.

The second great scandal in the teaching profession is the huge proportion of teachers who majored in the study of education as undergraduates instead of any academic field. Currently, a majority of the nation's teachers have their undergraduate major in education. Almost three-quarters of elementary school teachers majored in education, as did about one-third of the nation's high school teachers. This disregard for academic subject matter may help to explain why American students performed so poorly—besting only Cyprus and South Africa—in the latest international assessment of mathematics and science.

What is best for students? According to the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, student achievement is highest when teachers have an academic major plus appropriate professional courses and certification. This holds true, says the commission, no matter how poor the students, what their ethnicity or whether English is their second language. It makes sense: Students know when their teachers love their subject, and they catch the enthusiasm when they do.

To be sure, the study of education has value. Future teachers need to learn about good teaching methods from experienced teachers, to understand what makes students tick and to know how to deal with problems that arise in the classroom. They won't learn that by studying science, history or algebra. But if they don't study subject matter, what will they teach their students?

An undergraduate major in education makes little sense. What is the point of learning how to teach, if you don't know what to teach? Imagine a law school where future lawyers study how to try cases, how to understand the psyches of their clients and how to manage a law firm, but never study the law; or a medical school where future doctors study psychology and the philosophy of medicine but never learn how to cure any patients.

Even those members of Congress who agree that all teachers should be well-educated prefer to leave it to the states to decide whether their future teachers should get an academic major in college. At a time when the American public agrees that improving education is their highest priority, it is curious to see both parties embrace laissez-faire policies. Republicans have shown themselves willing to tell states what to do on subjects such as abortion and welfare reform, while Democrats always have been ready to set standards for participation in every other federal program.

Of course, states should chart their own course. But when they draw on the $ 2 billion in federal funds that support teacher preparation programs, they should expect that those dollars will be used to upgrade the quality of future teachers. On a matter that is so critical for improving education, why the sudden conversion to states' rights?

Policy Review, September/October 1998

Higher Standards for Teacher Training

By Eugene W. Hickok

No single element is more essential to students' success than excellence in teaching. Fine buildings, equipment, and textbooks are important, but it is the skill and dedication of the teacher that creates a place of learning. So it is both distressing and heartening that incompetence among the ranks of the nation's teachers is finally entering the spotlight. New York's state education department recently discovered that hundreds of its teachers, most of whom have master's degrees, could not pass a standard test in English, math, and reasoning skills. In response to a storm of public criticism, state education officials in Massachusetts recently repealed their decision to lower the qualifying score on a rather basic teacher-licensing exam after 59 percent of the applicants flunked it.

Pennsylvania governor Tom Ridge has decided to confront teacher incompetence with a bold new program that focuses on clear, measurable, and rigorous standards for the men and women preparing to be teachers. Indeed, as a result of the Teachers for the 21st Century Initiative, we believe that Pennsylvania's teachers will soon be the most qualified in the nation.

Low Expectations

Before the state enacted these vital changes, it was astonishing how little was expected of prospective teachers, many of whom received undergraduate or master's degrees from one of the state's 91 education programs. When we examined our system of teacher preparation and licensure in 1996, we found a system with limited assurances of competence and quality. We identified six areas of urgent concern:

- Few teacher-education programs had meaningful admission standards. Most undergraduate programs, at best, required prospective majors to have a 2.5 grade point average prior to majoring in education. In other words, the doors were open for C-plus students (or worse) to become teachers. Moreover, that requirement could be fulfilled with the easiest classes.
- Grading standards in teacher-education programs were extremely low. At one public university, 78 percent of students who took courses in "curriculum and foundations" received A's. But on that same campus, only 18 percent of the grades earned in English or physics were A's. A study of 14 state universities showed that the average grade in an education course was a full letter-grade higher than the average for a math course, and one-half grade higher than the average humanities grade.

A study by the National Center for Education Statistics confirmed that grade inflation has been far more pronounced in the nation's education departments than in other fields. The average grade in an education course was 3.41, compared with 2.96 in social sciences and 2.67 in science and engineering. We also found that many teacher-preparation programs were increasing the departmental requirements for education courses at the expense of strong preparation in academic subjects.

- Students preparing to be high-school teachers were not required to take the same courses as their peers who majored in academic subjects such as history or science. Mathematics majors, for example, have to complete courses in differential equations and advanced calculus, while education majors planning to teach high-school mathematics—including advanced-placement classes—could substitute a course in the history of mathematics for these rigorous courses. In Pennsylvania, we discovered that some candidates certified in foreign languages were unable to engage in basic conversations in the languages they were purportedly trained to teach.
- Many teacher-preparation programs had no meaningful standards for achievement in the academic content areas their candidates intended to teach.
- Even in nonacademic coursework, such as classroom management and professional skills, which these programs tend to emphasize, few departments had sufficient benchmarks to assess the progress of aspiring teachers.
- Passing scores on national standardized tests for teacher certification (the National Teachers Exam or Praxis exam) were set absurdly low. Although the questions are hardly difficult, Pennsylvania, like most other states, certified teaching candidates who scored in the bottom 10 percent on some of these tests.

In short, our education colleges were enrolling students with grade point averages of C-plus or lower, and the state was certifying teachers who earned the equivalent of an F on their licensure exams. This must never happen again. Governor Ridge's initiative, which was approved by the Pennsylvania state board of education last March, insists that teachers model academic accomplishment. Only a teacher who has achieved excellence can drive students to excel.

A New Standard

In order to receive accreditation by the state, a college of education will have to abide by the following standards:

Admissions. Pennsylvania will require that candidates for teacher-training programs complete the equivalent of at least three full semesters of college-level liberal arts courses with a B average before enrolling in a teacher-training program. This requirement is based on college course work exclusive of education courses. When we examined the problem of grade inflation, we determined that colleges and universities would maintain rigorous standards for their education students as long as the entrance requirements are grounded in the arts and sciences that are the core of all further study.

Curricular requirements. Prospective high-school teachers must fulfill the same course requirements as their classmates seeking a B.A. or B.S. in a particular academic discipline. This requires would-be teachers to develop a serious scholarly commitment to and expertise in the subjects they will teach. For example, a science teacher who has personally conducted laboratory research and who has personally pursued scientific inquiry is better equipped to guide students in creative and innovative work in science and technology. No amount of training in teaching methodology can substitute for real intellectual maturation in an academic area. Finally, the prospective teacher must maintain at least a B average in the subject area he or she intends to teach.

The new standards also require education students to acquire classroom experience at the very beginning of their training. We hope this will give them a sense of whether they have the commitment and temperament for teaching, as well as an opportunity for applying their academic training to the classrooms they will one day lead.

Finally, we have required colleges of education to ensure that education majors can complete a teacher-preparation program as well as their requirements in an academic subject in four years, like other baccalaureate students. Some education programs have expanded to five years as their course requirements in methodology have proliferated. This may be good for the job security of education professors, but it is an unethical misuse of taxpayers' funds and student tuition.

Qualifying test scores. We have begun to lift the minimum qualifying scores on licensing exams gradually from the bottom quintile or decile of test takers, depending on the subject area, to scores that approach the national average. Before 1997, candidates could pass the Professional Knowledge Test with a score in the 5th percentile of test takers; now the passing score represents the 28th percentile. We have also raised the threshold for the mathematics exam from the 16th percentile to the 37th, and from the 16th percentile to the 42nd in biology. No longer will the state certify teachers who miss half or more of the questions.

Alternative certification. One size does not fit all in the preparation of teachers. We are creating guidelines by which those who have completed their undergraduate or graduate education with distinction and have passed the appropriate licensing exams will be permitted to enter teaching-apprenticeship programs at eligible public schools. Other states have already found that this type of program bolsters their teaching force by allowing uniquely qualified individuals to contribute to their public schools. In fact, some studies even show that teachers who gained alternative certification were more skilled than their traditionally licensed counterparts. Detractors claim that these programs allow unqualified persons to enter the profession, but research shows that they actually are windows of opportunity for those with special expertise and a commitment to improve schools.

The Money Trap

The National Education Association has declared its objective to make licensure "a process controlled by the profession." It is clear to us that the profession has been doing little to ensure that new teachers have the knowledge base they need and much to ensure that colleges of education could expand their control of the preparation of public-school teachers. Although per-pupil expenditures in the United States are among the highest in the world, most reform efforts still assume that only more money will help our children. National and international studies, however, show that our high expenditures and intense focus on educational theory have not served us well where it matters: the academic performance of our schoolchildren.

President Clinton's answer to our classroom woes is another high-cost, low-yield fix: funding 100,000 new teachers in order to lower classroom size. This is misguided for two reasons. First, the teaching force will not be invigorated by the infusion of yet more teachers held to the same mediocre standards in subject knowledge. Second, there is no evidence that smaller classes by themselves have more than a marginal effect on student performance. A growing body of research, on the other hand, validates what common sense tells us: Teachers with better academic preparation and skills are more effective, and their pupils perform better. A 1991 Texas study by Ronald Ferguson showed that student achievement had a positive correlation to the performance of teachers on a statewide standardized test, and a recent study by Daniel Goldhaber and Dominic Brewer of high-school math teachers, published last summer in the *Journal of Human Resources*, demonstrated a strong connection between the teachers' preparation in their subject area and their students' achievement test scores. Says Eric Hanushek, an economist and education expert at the University of Rochester, "The only reasonably consistent finding seems to be that smarter teachers do better in terms of student achievement."

The Cost of Quality

Some skeptics may object that states already facing teacher shortages (Pennsylvania is not among them) cannot afford to raise the qualifying standards for the profession. But we will never be able to place a qualified teacher in every classroom by pretending that quality does not matter. Rather than recruiting the mediocre by lowering standards, states need to make teaching in the public schools a prestigious career open to only the best qualified. Moreover, public schools can use alternative certification to draw upon a large group of eager professionals—many with advanced degrees—who wish to serve in public education. Experience shows that this talent pool includes highly skilled post-doctoral students, scientists, and adjunct college faculty keen to share their expertise.

Under the leadership of Governor Ridge, Pennsylvania's new standards require objective criteria for admission, curriculum, and academic achievement in teacher preparation. We are firmly convinced that the dynamic new teachers who will emerge from these stronger schools of education, augmented by a carefully designed alternative-certification program, will justify this effort. We owe our children and our nation no less.

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The Boston Globe, September 16, 1998

State plan would decertify lagging teacher programs

By Jordana Hart

ALDEN - The state Board of Education yesterday took an important step toward shutting down college teaching programs where more than 20 percent of students fail the state's mandatory teacher certification test for two consecutive years.

Board members also approved a motion by board chairman John Silber to eventually lower the failure threshold to 10 percent.

By unanimous vote, the nine-member board instructed Interim Education Commissioner David Driscoll to draft a proposal on decertifying those programs, making them far less attractive to prospective students intent on becoming teachers. Driscoll expects to present the proposal at the board's Oct. 13 meeting.

The board vote comes after Acting Governor Paul Cellucci first suggested that college teaching programs should have at least an 80-percent pass rate, or be shut down.

"It is obviously a big step because, if we take the governor's proposal literally, it means that most of the state's programs would not meet that level," Driscoll said yesterday after the meeting.

Of the 54 colleges whose students took the teacher test in both April and July, only two - Harvard University and Wellesley College - met the 80 percent pass threshold, though only eight Harvard students and five Wellesley students took the tests. Boston College had 151 students take the two tests, with 78 percent of them passing, according to state data.

The next teacher test is Oct. 3.

To help teachers prepare for upcoming exams, Driscoll said he will convene meetings next month for deans and other university officials to review actual exam questions.

"We hope that will go a long way to demystify the tests," Driscoll said.

But Mary Brabeck, dean of Boston College's School of Education, said yesterday that she's unsure whether she will attend the meetings because the state has yet to independently validate the test as fair.

"We want actual analysis of the test, not just the opportunity to look at the test," she said. "We want evidence that it is a valid instrument."

While the proposal is still subject to discussion and approval and would not be implemented until 2000, the board vote shows officials are intent on holding teacher training programs to high standards following a 59-percent failure rate on the April test.

In July, 47 percent of would-be teachers failed what the state describes as a basic test of reading, writing, and knowledge of the subject they plan to teach.

At an education summit in August, deans and others said they were being unfairly criticized, insisting they alone are not to blame for the high failure rates. Above all, they complained that the teacher test had yet to be measured and validated by an independent analyst to determine whether it is fair.

But Cellucci and the state's top education policymakers dismissed their complaints as "denial," and called for more testing, higher college entrance exam scores for program admission, and an end to college grade inflation.

Indeed, Silber has never hidden his eagerness to close programs that ultimately prove to be failures - including his own at Boston University, where he is chancellor.

Yesterday, Brabeck said it is too early to talk about closing schools when so few details are clear.

"When they say 80 percent and two consecutive years, what does that mean?" Brabeck said, asking how the state would treat failure rates when students may pass one section, but fail another.

Driscoll said his draft proposal will address such questions.

Also yesterday, the board voted on key cutoff scores for the 210,000 fourth-, eighth-, and 10th-graders who took the first Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System or MCAS test last May.

The vote allows education officials to proceed to the next level of grading. They must now sort 6 million open-ended, essay-style questions and 20 million multiple-choice questions according to four achievement levels - advanced, proficient, needs improvement, and failing. Some 1,400 graders in Massachusetts and New Hampshire scored the questions over the summer.

State testing director Jeff Nellhaus said he expects to have scores ready by the end of November not only for the 347 school districts, but also for the state's 1,800 schools, its thousands of individual classrooms, and each student.

But Silber said he wants Nellhaus and the testing company, New Hampshire-based Advanced Systems, to "validate" their scoring process and methodology as accurate and fair.

The board also emphasized that it has yet to determine a passing score and acceptable proficiency level for 10th-graders who, beginning in 2003, must pass the MCAS in order to graduate from high school.

At the meeting, Silber said he is concerned that so many of the MCAS scoring panels disagreed on assigning proficiency levels to student answers. For example, he said, eight scorers on the eighth-grade English panel categorized an answer as 'proficient,' while eight others marked it as 'needs improvement.'

"A yellow light should be flashing for students who just squeaked by into the 'proficient' level," said board member Abigail Thernstrom.

The Houston Chronicle, September 02, 1998

Ratings sting teacher programs ;

Accreditation of 35 schools 'under review' due to minority grades

by KATHY WALT

AUSTIN - More than 40 percent of the 85 colleges, universities and other programs that prepare Texas classroom teachers failed to meet minimum standards, primarily because of difficulties minority students had passing exams, according to the state's first-ever accountability ratings released Tuesday.

Among the 35 programs that fell short were Southern Methodist University and Baylor University, generally considered among the more prestigious of Texas colleges, as well as some campuses affiliated with the Texas A&M University system.

The ratings were based on prospective teachers' passing rates on certification tests. The results, released by the State Board for Educator Certification, indicate that virtually all of the programs that failed to measure up got their low ratings because of performance of minority students, primarily African-Americans. In all, 50 teacher preparation programs were "accredited" and 35 were given the lower "accredited under review" ranking.

"These ratings are the first of their kind in the nation," said Jim Nelson, chairman of the certification board. "Over time, we're certain they will result in the increased effectiveness of beginning teachers."

But in the short run, the accountability ratings are sure to spark controversy, said Ann Hansen, director of SMU's Center for Teacher Preparation, whose low rating was attributed to the failure of just two of 59 students who took the exam, both of them black. Overall, 93 percent of SMU students passed.

At Baylor, which had an overall passing rate of 87 percent among the 338 first-time test-takers, eight of 12 black students failed one test, bringing the entire school's rating down, said Robert Yinger, dean of the education school.

Had one more black student passed one more test, Baylor would have received an accredited rating, Yinger added.

"Should a whole program be called on the carpet based on one student's examination?" he asked.

State standards require that at least 70 percent of prospective teachers overall and in every ethnic and gender category pass the certification exam the first time they take it. If a program falls short in any one of those categories, it must have cumulative passing rates of 80 percent or better overall and in each category.

Prospective teachers take two tests, one in academic content areas like geography, math and English. The other exam covers professional teacher preparation, which includes such issues as teaching methodology and classroom management.

At SMU, only three African-American students were among the first-time test-takers, and two of them failed one portion of the test, Hansen said. Both have subsequently passed but their passing scores will not be included in the school's cumulative scores until next year.

Both SMU and Baylor plan to appeal their ratings.

Stephanie Korcheck, director of policy and planning for the certification board, said schools that had fewer than 10 students in any category of test-takers will be allowed to appeal their ratings. Nineteen of the 35 programs will be eligible to appeal.

Korcheck added that the agency's interim acting director, Pamela Tackett, will review the appeals and decide which programs will be boosted to an "accredited" rating based on their plans for addressing shortcomings.

"I think it's the executive director's intention to be somewhat generous this year," Korcheck added.

Nonetheless, the ratings stung some schools.

"It doesn't feel very fair right now," said Baylor's Yinger.

Korcheck defended the rating system, even in the cases where one or two students' scores dragged down an entire school's rating. "I think it's more than fair, because they let them in" with the promise that a degree or completion of a certification program would get them a teaching certificate, she said.

"The horror and the beauty of this system is that the performance of each and every student is important," Korcheck added.

But she also said the system indicates that "the preparation provided to minority students, particularly African-Americans, is not adequate."

Among the worst performing schools were Paul Quinn College in Dallas, which failed standards in every category, and Southwestern Adventist College in Keene, which failed in every category except white students.

Robert Watkins of the Division of Education at Paul Quinn did not return a call from the Houston Chronicle, and Dee Anderson of Southwestern Adventist College said she could not comment because she had not seen her school's results.

Four schools in the Texas A&M System did not meet the requirements, all because of poor test scores by black students. They include the historically black Prairie View A&M University and the A&M affiliates in Commerce, Corpus Christi and Texarkana.

Korcheck also said that most students failed tests in academic content areas - subjects that are taught not by schools of education but by other departments within a university, such as math, geography and biology.

Arturo Pacheco, dean of the College of Education at the University of Texas-El Paso and a member of the educator certification board, said the accountability system encourages college faculty to work together to improve teacher preparation.

"Prior to (the accountability system), typically the college of education was held responsible for the quality of teachers graduating from the university," he said. "With (the system), the whole university becomes accountable for preparing future educators."

Teams of educators will begin working with those programs that failed to meet state standards.

Programs that fail to meet state standards for three years in a row will lose their state certification to provide teacher training, Korcheck said.

"Any time you do something like this the first time there is shock," Korcheck added. "By shining a light on the problem you identify and figure out ways to fix it."

School ratings

Educator-preparation programs are listed as "accredited" and "accredited under review" by the State Board for Educator Certification. The "accredited under review" category represents those that didn't meet state standards.

National Review, August 17, 1998

SCHOOL DAZE

Firing Offenses

Why is the quality of teachers so low? Just try getting rid of a bad one.

PETER SCHWEIZER

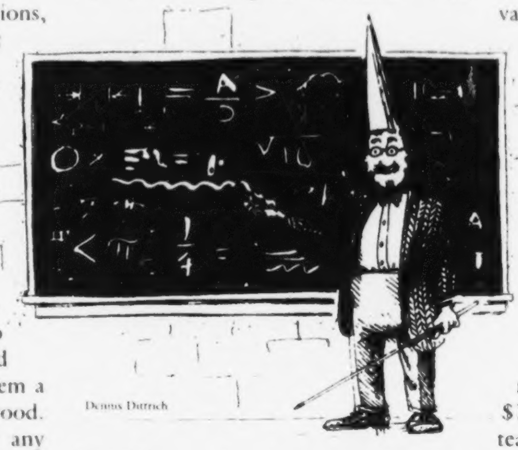
NATIONAL Education Association President Bob Chase, undaunted by the news that more than half of Massachusetts teachers had failed their competency tests, characterizes the problem of bad teachers as a matter of "a few bad apples." But when America's children return to the classroom this fall, many of them will be instructed by teachers who are not only incompetent, but sometimes actively dangerous. And the teachers unions make removing them nearly impossible. In recent years, the unions have gone to bat for felons and for teachers who have had sexual relations with their students, as well as for teachers who demonstrably could not teach. For the unions, apparently no apple is so bad that it need be tossed from the barrel.

The process of getting rid of problem teachers, especially those with tenure, can be so arduous and expensive that many school districts don't even bother anymore. "Getting rid of a problem teacher can make the O.J. trial look like a cake walk," says Mary Jo McGrath, an attorney in Santa Barbara, California, who helps administrators deal with bad teachers. "For a principal, it can seem a lot easier to hang on to the dead wood. Teachers are more protected than any other class of employees, with all the procedural rights that can drag a civil case out for years."

"Legally, the union doesn't need to take every case we make against a teacher," explains Stephen M. Robinson, a former teacher who is now an attorney representing six school districts in Rhode Island. "But they do. They'll defend even the worst offenders."

Michael Levin, an attorney for several suburban Philadelphia school districts, says: "I've been in this business for 25 years. Nothing surprises me any more. I just had my first cannibalism case."

Much of the problem stems from the tenure system, which means that after three or four years it is virtually impossible in most states for a teacher to get fired. "Tenure was originally designed to protect the best teachers from wrongful termination," says the reform-minded Frank Brogan, Florida's first Republican education commissioner. (Brogan was recently chosen as Jeb Bush's running mate in this year's race for governor and lieutenant governor.) "Today it protects the worst teachers from rightful termination." And teachers can expect their unions almost always to back them up no matter what they have done. As Kathleen Winter, co-president of the Scituate Teachers Association in Rhode Island, admitted to the *Providence Journal-Bulletin*, "Teachers pay substantial amounts of money to the union. If I'm paying $450 a year [in dues], if I get into a jam, I want something for my money."



Dennis Dittrich

In 1994 a teacher in Florida was in just such a jam. Florida Department of Education investigators were alerted by local officials that a student had been coaxed by a teacher into a sexual relationship, including oral and anal sex. When confronted with the evidence, the teacher resigned. But he insisted on keeping his teacher's license so that he could work in a classroom somewhere else. "Naturally, we didn't think it was a good idea to have this guy near kids," the investigator who handled the case says. So the FDOE pushed to have his license permanently revoked. But the local NEA affiliate supported the teacher. An administrative-law court finally ruled that he should lose his certification permanently, but it had taken more than two years and tens of thousands of dollars in legal and administrative costs to reach that point.

In 1989, police officers in the same Florida county had caught a female teacher and one of her students naked in a car near a public park. In this case too the FDOE pushed to take away the teacher's license. But the local NEA affiliate argued that she should be allowed to teach again. The FDOE prevailed, but it took more than three years and close to $100,000.

In 1996 school administrators in San Francisco discovered that a teacher was placing her 6-year-old students in a trash can, closing the lid, and kicking the can. She was finally suspended when a fellow teacher overheard her threatening to cut off a child's private parts with a pair of scissors. Thanks to heavy resistance from the local affiliate of the NEA, pursuing her dismissal cost the district more than $100,000, and the woman later got a teaching job elsewhere.

Michael Levin, the attorney for the Philadelphia schools, says these cases are typical: "The teacher fights you and doesn't just walk away," he told me. "The union will back them." A recent study by the New York State School Boards Association found that the average termination in the Empire State took 319 days and cost $112,000. If the teacher appeals the decision, the cost is likely to top $300,000. In Illinois, the average contested dismissal case takes three years and costs at least $70,000—

Mr. Schweizer is a Media Fellow at the Hoover Institution at Stanford University and co-author of the forthcoming book **The Mouse Betrayed: Greed, Corruption, and Children at Risk in Disney's Secret World** *(Regnery).*

more if the teacher appeals. Given the cost in time and money, few teachers actually get terminated. In the entire state of New York only 219 termination cases were brought in the 1996–97 school year.

And the monetary costs go beyond administrative and legal expenses. In many states, contracts negotiated by teachers unions mean that bad teachers continue to get paid during the dismissal process, no matter how gross the offense. James Plosia, an attorney for the Northern Highlands Regional School District in New Jersey (which includes the wealthy towns of Allendale and Upper Saddle River) says, "It'll usually take eighteen months or two years before you finally complete the case. So on top of legal bills and administrative costs, you're paying them more than a year's worth of salary." That applies even if they are serving time in jail.

Consider the case of Carolyn White. A fourth-grade teacher at the nationally acclaimed Watchung elementary school in suburban New Jersey, the 48-year-old teacher had logged 27 years in the classroom. She was kind to her students, but she would disappear from the classroom for long periods. Her homework assignments were confusing, and due dates changed at a whim. Her written comments to students were indecipherable.

The problem teacher gets quietly passed along to someone else.

In May 1996, as her students were heading back to their classroom after gym, a 5-year-old girl asked to stop in the lavatory. The child emerged holding a lipstick case that she had picked up. She handed her find to a teacher's aide, who opened it and discovered five vials, two of them filled with cocaine.

Meanwhile, back in the classroom, Miss White had begun a frantic search. "I lost something," she told her students in a panic. She ordered two boys to rifle through their classmates' backpacks. When her lipstick case didn't turn up, she began frisking the bewildered children. Eventually she was arrested and carted off to jail for drug possession. The district superintendent suspended her almost immediately. But she continued to receive her $56,000 salary throughout the months-long criminal hearings. It was part of her teachers-union contract.

In Brooklyn, a special-education teacher was convicted and jailed for selling $7,000 worth of cocaine. The New York City Board of Education moved immediately to terminate him, but the union supported him. After a three-year fight and $185,000 in legal expenses the board managed to suspend the teacher for two years.

OFTEN, as a way to save time and money, an administrator will cut a deal with the union in which he agrees to give a bad teacher a satisfactory rating in return for union help in transferring him to another district. The problem teacher gets quietly passed along to someone else. Administrators call it "the dance of the lemons" or "passing the trash." Howard Fuller, the superintendent of Milwaukee public schools from 1991 to 1995, explains, "Administrators found they needed to trade bad teachers because it's easier than getting rid of them. We had one teacher who put a student's head down the toilet. He simply got moved to another school."

Robert C. Devaney is a case in point. In November 1981, Devaney abruptly resigned as a special-education teacher at North Providence High School in Rhode Island after a student complained that he had made sexual overtures. But Devaney got good references and began teaching in Charlestown, New Hampshire. He was let go from Charlestown in March 1986, again for sexual misconduct. But he got another favorable recommendation and moved to Connecticut. By March 1987 he had resigned from Killingly Junior High School after a complaint that he had asked to photograph a student in exchange for cash.

By 1989, he was back in Rhode Island, as a substitute teacher at Mount Pleasant High School in Providence. Trouble erupted five years later. Finally in May of 1996 Devaney was in jail, sentenced to serve twenty years for sexually assaulting a special-education student and making sexually explicit videotapes and photographs of two other students.

Never once did Devaney's references mention any of his misconduct. In each case administrators found it easier to "pass the trash" than fight the local union for his termination. At the sentencing hearing, Superior Court Judge Maureen McKenna Goldberg said, "The employment background of this defendant who was shuffled from one school department to another, from one bureaucrat to the next, is a crime in itself."

Administrators' great fear is getting on the wrong side of the unions. Stephen Robinson explains: "I have to make sure I cross all my *t*'s and dot all my *i*'s with the teachers union when handling a case, because they're going to come after me. The union takes a very aggressive stance when it knows a teacher is in the cross-hairs. There will be a very aggressive union rep at prehearings, at post-evaluation meetings. The rep walks into the administrator's office and questions the administrator's right to do A, B, or C. It takes a very strong-willed administrator to fight through that."

In the fall semester of 1987, four girls at Coventry Junior High School in Rhode Island complained about a science teacher who was continually touching them. Superintendent Raymond Spear wrote the teacher a letter advising him to refrain from such activity. Later in the year, twelve girls complained about him, and four of the complaints involved potentially criminal behavior. "We felt we had enough evidence to go before the grand jury," Police Chief Bruce Germani told the *Providence Journal-Bulletin*.

The police turned the file over to the Coventry School Committee, which promptly fired the teacher. But with the help of his union, the Coventry Teachers Alliance, he got a restraining order in Kent County Superior Court to prevent his termination on the grounds that he had not been given a pre-dismissal hearing. The union's attorney also convinced the court that the teacher had a right to face his accusers at a hearing. All the girls said they were too frightened to testify, and the teacher had to be reinstated by the school committee. For good measure, the Coventry Teachers Alliance sued the school committee in January of 1989 contending that it had unfairly targeted the teacher. (The suit was eventually dropped.)

Getting rid of teachers who have committed crimes can be expensive, but it happens. What is nearly impossible is getting rid of a teacher who is simply incompetent. School-district officials in St. Louis had to work for three years to get rid of an algebra teacher who passed out A's to students who would bring her Big Gulps and Snickers bars. In suburban Chicago, a school district had to fight the union the entire way, spending $70,000 in the process, in order to dismiss a math teacher who couldn't answer basic algebra questions. But these cases are the exception, James Plosia says: "Even though it is possible to remove an incompetent teacher, the process that you have to follow means you win the battle, but lose the war."

NOT even failing to show up for class will cost a tenured teacher his job. In 1997 Wallace Bowers, an English teacher in Collinsville, Illinois, was fired from North Junior High School when he failed to come to school for six weeks. When he finally returned, he claimed that he had been upset because someone had changed grades from F to D without his consent. But a handwriting expert told an arbitrator that Bowers had changed the grades himself.

Bowers said he wanted to keep his job, but superintendent Thomas Fegley stood firm: "We don't necessarily concur that somebody can quit coming to work for six weeks and get his job back." So Bowers challenged the district, with the backing of the powerful Illinois Education Association, an affiliate of the NEA. In the end Judge Henry X. Dietch found in Bowers's favor, not because of the merits of the case but because of the strange protections offered teachers under Illinois law. If a teacher's conduct, whatever it might be, is "remediable," a school board must offer a notice to remedy before firing the teacher. Bowers went back into the classroom and received full back pay.

Some states have adopted new policies to make it easier to dismiss incompetent teachers. In 1997, Frank Brogan, whose qualifications as Florida education commissioner include a stint as a fifth-grade public-school teacher, championed a law that compresses the process for termination from two years to 90 days and institutes a 97-day probationary period for new teachers. During the 1997-98 school year, 303 teachers either were let go or resigned during the new probationary period. But termination unfortunately does not guarantee that a teacher is out of the classroom. "We have actually gone through the process and revoked the teaching certificates of some individuals only to have them show up as a paraprofessional—a teacher's assistant—in the same classroom the next day," Brogan complains. "They get virtually the same pay and benefits."

Now, even some public-school teachers are turning against the absurd system. Joe Nathan spent 14 years as a public-school teacher in Minnesota and served on the board of the Minnesota Parent–Teachers Association. His wife still teaches in a public school. Today, as head of the Center for School Change at the University of Minnesota's Hubert Humphrey Institute, he has blunt words about the current system. "The tenure system is really adult welfare," he told me. "It cheats kids of the most effective faculty, and keeps some of the worst teachers in place. It's a system that puts the needs of adults first."

That is certainly the case when it comes to hiring and firing on the basis of seniority, which prevails in almost every state. The result is often that ineffective teachers keep their jobs while hard-charging younger teachers are shown the door. On Thursday, May 28, Sarah Gustafson was inducted into the Florida Educator Hall of Fame by Commissioner Brogan, an acknowledgment of the Florida Teacher of the Year award she received in 1991. The next day, she was canned by the Brevard County School District. Her school was cutting back because of declining enrollment, and the former Teacher of the Year had less seniority than several colleagues with mediocre job appraisals.

The same thing happened to Cathy Nelson, Minnesota's Teacher of the Year in 1990. She lost her teaching job at Fridley High School just outside of Minneapolis because others in her department had more years of service.

There have been efforts around the country to change teacher-tenure laws. At least four states—Oklahoma, Massachusetts, Colorado, and New Mexico—have eliminated tenure for new teachers. But the problem is more fundamental than that. Mary Jo McGrath, who is advising California governor Pete Wilson on tenure issues, thinks that even if tenure is taken away, it probably won't become significantly easier to can bad teachers. "Even if you change the procedure from tenure to something else, you still have harassment from the unions," she told me. "As an administrator you want peace. You don't want the union nipping at your heals." Until the unions' power is broken, the minor fixes will remain just that.

Meanwhile, what about the cannibalism case in Philadelphia? "The teacher was telling students and fellow teachers that she lured a young girl to a remote house where her father and a next-door neighbor killed her. She told one teacher that she ate part of the girl," says Michael Levin. No body has been found, and so criminal charges were not filed. The teacher was fired, however—and because she was a substitute the union did not make a fuss. However, the school system, Levin notes, is now in court. "She's suing us under the Americans with Disabilities Act on the grounds that she suffers from post-traumatic-stress syndrome." ☐

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Selected Readings on School Reform

Curriculum & Pedagogy

Curious about what American children are actually being taught? This section provides some startling revelations. Our first article, "Resisting Education's Fads" by Gail Russell Chaddock of the *Christian Science Monitor,* examines why school districts tend to be vulnerable to fads in education. Critical of superintendents who jump on the bandwagon of new instructional methods, Chaddock urges schools and parents to press for substantive data and research.

That message hasn't gotten through to the El Puente Academy for Peace and Justice, located in Brooklyn, New York. In her *City Journal* article, "An F for Hip-Hop 101," Heather Mac Donald explains that students at El Puente can sign up for a class in which they learn how to make graffiti "tags," deejay, rap, and break-dance.

Next, we turn to fads in math education, by way of Martin Gardner's article in *The New York Review of Books*, "The New New Math." Gardner takes a critical look at several new math textbooks that are beholden to the curricular ideas of the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics. These books discuss environmentalism, multiculturalism—everything, it seems, except for math.

Stan Metzenberg, Associate Professor of Biology at California State University-Northridge, provides some searing comments on the National Science Education Standards and the AAAS Benchmarks for Science Literacy in his testimony before the U.S. House of Representatives. Metzenberg faults the National Science Foundation for backing standards that were not decided upon by a consensus of scientists, but rather were primarily written by education specialists.

Finally, to remind us that reading is a fundamental element of a good education—and to end this section on a more positive note—we leave you with Annie Dillard's "What Reading Does for the Soul," as it appeared in *American Educator*. For anyone who knows what it is like to be lost in a good book, we suggest that you read this excerpt from the Pulitizer Prize winning author's memoir. And, for anyone concerned with reading, we suggest you locate a copy of the *American Educator* (Spring/Summer 1998) because the entire issue is devoted to the power and instruction of reading. It's first-rate. For a copy, contact the American Federation of Teachers at 202-879-4420.

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The Christian Science Monitor, August 25, 1998

Perils of the Pendulum: Resisting Education's Fads

By Gail Russell Chaddock, Staff writer of The Christian Science Monitor

WASHINGTON--Teachers call it the "reform du jour," and for many, it's the biggest challenge at the start of any school year. That's when the latest idea for how to improve student performance kicks in.

In the 1970s, it was the open classroom, which knocked out the walls between classes to create flexible space and make learning more fun. Soon, carpenters were tapping away at new walls to get the noise level back down.

In the 1980s, many districts tucked away the phonics books to make way for "whole-language" instruction, which emphasized context and the personal value of reading.

The new books were engaging, but many kids weren't learning to read. Teachers were ordered to dig out the flash cards.

The 1990s brought down new mandates to teach to individual "learning styles - despite a lack of consensus on how to measure learning styles, or whether it is better to teach to a learning style or to help students overcome it.

Even critics note these ideas have valid points. But they were often adopted without data - without balancing the claims of competing teaching techniques - and then taken to extremes. That resulting pendulum swings are prompting a reevaluation of how educators adopt new practices in the classroom.

"There's a very substantial metamorphosis of the culture of education going on in this country - a new demand for research-based educational practices," says Douglas Carnine, director of the National Center to Improve the Tools of Educators, which is based in Eugene, Ore.

Education isn't the only field to cope with fads, but it has features that make it especially vulnerable. A large number of unjuried professional journals let inadequate research pass uncritically. Key decisionmakers, like urban superintendents, typically hold jobs for three years and feel pressed to show results fast.

Educational research is often poorly funded as well, and the federal government and foundations often lean toward what is new, rather than what is proven effective.

"The gap between the research community and the practitioner community is much wider than what you'd find between practicing engineers and physicists," says John Bruer, president of the St. Louis-based James S. McDonnell Foundation, which supports educational and biomedical research.

Whether early readers should be taught whole language or phonics is a case in point. Last March, the National Research Council released a landmark report that announced a truce, or "pax lectura," in the nation's "reading wars." The report urged an end to take-no-prisoner swings from one method to another: Good reading instruction includes both, it argued.

"People in the field of reading are very passionate about correcting the errors that they see their predecessors as having made. The field looks faddish because people have gone too far down a reasonable road," says ,Catherine Snow, who chaired the National Research Council's report, "Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children."

"Many state boards of education had been losing faith in publishers and the education establishment for telling them what to do," she adds.

A key recommendation of this report is that schools require that publishers provide data to support claims of the effectiveness of their products.

"The reading wars had eased off even before publication of this report. If they hadn't we could never have reached a consensus," Ms. Snow notes.

Barbara Grohe, this year's National Superintendent of the Year, lived through two decades of the reading wars as a former reading teacher. "There has been a tendency to go from one end of the continuum directly to the other end without stopping in between to find a balance," she says. "It's almost as if to make your point that one approach doesn't work, you need to go to the exact opposite."

Teaching to the brain?

Now, brain research is fueling a new generation of textbooks, curriculum kits, and visiting consultants. It's one of the most popular areas for in-service teacher training, experts say.

"Teachers are lapping this up like you would not believe," says Napa, Calif.-based consultant Pat Wolf, who works with schools in the United States and 35 other countries. "Brain research isn't just another fad that will pass. It gives us a scientific foundation for human learning."

But critics warn that there is very little quality control for the academic projects that many consultants are spinning out of it.

"We just don't know enough about how the brain works to make claims about brain-based curricula," says Mr. Bruer.

"Teachers and principals are interested in doing a better job for their kids, and brain research is a very seductive way to do this. But teachers and principals aren't given the training to read a research article critically," he adds.

Some practices that claim to derive from brain research are already under siege. For example, parents in California and Utah recently won lawsuits against local school districts for practicing "cranial manipulations" on children to improve reading, says Mr. Carnine.

"This practice has no basis in brain research, and can actually harm children," he notes.

Antifad tactics

Parents and teachers groups who see the costs of fads close up were among the first to develop their own standards. For example, the American Federation ofTeachers, the No. 2 teachers union, started a summer institute to train teachers to identify research-grounded techniques and question fads and "quick-fix" in-service programs. Meeting in Washington July 24 to Aug. 2, many teacher-trainers had horror stories of their own encounters with educational fads.

"Typically, teachers get two days of training in the latest fad and then they're told they'll be evaluated in two weeks. It's chicanery. It's not what you need to be a qualified professional," says Marcia Berger, co-director of the AFT summer institute.

Ms. Berger dates her own union involvement to an in-service teacher-training session in 1984, "when 600 kids were sent home from school so teachers could watch a consultant demonstrate how patterns and rhythms in tap dancing could improve language ability.... It was my all-time low as a teacher," she says.

Not all new ideas are fads - and, by definition, great ideas start somewhere, and reliable data take time to develop.

"It's very important to consult the research base. However, it is possible that we may have to move into new areas without a research base or else no change will happen," says Gary Marx, spokesman for the American Association of School Administrators.

Consulting first

One solution to that dilemma is for superintendents to consult broadly with teachers before launching a new program, and to make sure that relevant research is shared broadly and understood.

"I'm very skeptical of quick fixes. Every few years there is a quick fix or a cute idea that people jump to. Sometimes that happens out of frustration of parents and educators because they haven't been able to make the growth they wanted," says Carol Grosse Peck, who has been superintendent of the Alhambra School District in Phoenix for the past 13 years.

Her district developed a national reputation because its students, largely from poor families, consistently achieve at or above national norms. "When we look at the new ideas coming down the line, I match them up with what I know works from my years as a teacher and an administrator. Then I look at what they would replace. Sometimes it's not that the fad is harmful, it's the loss of the instruction and the program it replaces."

The Washington-based Evaluation of Research on Educational Approaches, founded with the support of unions, principals and superintendents, aims to help educators make that call. It is about to issue its first report evaluating the resultsof programs for children in poverty in October.

"Professional development for teachers has been very hit-and-miss. Some gurus of the month do some good, some do no good at all, some do positive harm," says the McDonnell Foundation's Bruer.

HOW TO FAD-PROOF YOUR SCHOOL

The key to fad-proofing your school is to look for things that work and avoid those that don't. Here are suggestions from some top superintendents and teachers:

- Remember that the most entertaining consultant does not always have the best ideas.

- Textbook publishers or consultants rarely provide data or evidence that their materials or in-service programs are effective. Insist on it.

- Take a hard look at the research base behind a proposal: What's the evidence that students will learn more under the new program than under the program it is replacing? What is the experimental design of the study and how strong is the evidence? How similar are students in this study to those in your classroom?

- Is the method of teaching described in sufficient detail that it can be replicated in the classrooms. Extremely talented teachers can do wonders with about any program; you need to be sure that a program is effective even when not brilliantly executed.

- Move slowly and include teachers in researching, deciding, and implementing a new program.

- Start new programs on a sample group and test the results before expanding to the whole district.

City Journal, Summer 1998

An F for Hip-Hop 101

By Heather Mac Donald

As the M train crawls toward Brooklyn over the Williamsburg Bridge, it traverses a gauntlet of graffiti. Scrawls cover every surface of the bridge—from the aging wooden trestles all the way up to the central towers, so impasted with spray paint that they appear made of lace. The cupola of a church, visible from the train, wears a graffiti crown of thorns. So it is sadly fitting that below, directly in the shadow of the bridge, students at a Brooklyn public high school are learning how to write graffiti for academic credit.

"I don't know what happened with this piece," instructor Edgar Miranda says impatiently, as he scrutinizes a student's design for "bombing" a subway car, or covering it head to toe in graffiti. The scribbles don't hang together as an artistic whole, Miranda frets. Another student fares much better. "This piece is dope," Miranda enthuses in up-to-the-minute street slang, praising a design of a smoking man on one side of a subway car with a whale-like bubble on the other. "You've actually used 'characters'"—graffiti terminology for human figures.

At El Puente Academy, progressive education's quest for "relevance" produces mighty strange results.

Welcome to Hip-Hop 101, at El Puente Academy for Peace and Justice, a course that teaches students not only how to write graffiti but also how to deejay at parties, break-dance (a once popular form of street gymnastics), and emcee or rap. These four activities make up the ghetto-born movement known as "hip-hop culture." Hip-Hop 101 students carry around the traditional graffiti vandal's "black book" in which to perfect their personal graffiti "tag." Do they transfer their learning to the real world? "I have no knowledge of it, nor do I care to find out," instructor Miranda laughs. But of course, the answer is both predictable and easily within reach.

A quick glance around El Puente Academy for Peace and Justice would suggest that a course in hip-hop culture is about as needed as Viagra at the high school prom. El Puente is a small, very friendly, emphatically non-traditional alternative public high school, crammed into every cranny of an abandoned church in the Hasidic and Hispanic neighborhood of Williamsburg. The billowing denim, the beepers, and the designer logos on the school's mostly Hispanic student body suggest a keen awareness of every nuance of ghetto culture.

But El Puente is not about to let mere redundancy stand in the way of a class as trendy as Hip-Hop 101, for the academy is the very embodiment of progressive education, and Hip-Hop 101 is progressivism made flesh. El Puente calls its teachers "facilitators," considers the collaborative student group the foundation of learning, and organizes its curriculum around large, politically correct themes, like sweatshops or the connection between sugar and slavery. Also quintessentially progressive is the central role political activism plays in the school's mission. El Puente evaluates students on their commitment to "social and economic justice." The students have demonstrated such commitment by protesting a local incinerator as "environmental racism"; as part of El Puente's after-school program, they will soon staff a center intended to help the garment workers' union UNITE, organize workers. Executive director Luis Garden Acosta summed up the school's philosophy to *Newsday* in 1992: the school is "not just about reading and writing and math," he said, "but it's also about wellness, career development, housing, racial justice, and peace."

This may seem a large agenda for a small school, but Acosta is used to thinking big. After serving in the administration of New York mayor John Lindsay in the late 1960s, Acosta joined the Young Lords, a militant Puerto Rican gang whose 13-point platform included such demands as the abolition of capitalism, "liberation for all Third World peoples," and "armed self-defense and armed struggle [as] the only means to revolution." Acosta has become more Establishment since then, but his rhetoric, with its talk of "education for liberation," contains much of the old fire.

A quick glance around El Puente Academy would suggest that a course in hip-hop culture is about as needed as Viagra at the high school prom.

For progressive idiocy, nothing beats Hip-Hop 101. The course is a classic example of student-centered learning. Rather than imposing a fixed, traditional curriculum, student-centered learning argues for letting students pursue their own intellectual interests (though assuming they reliably have any is, of course, the first mistake). In the 1960s, this doctrine picked up a new catchword: students and teachers alike began demanding education that was "relevant" to youth, especially urban youth. The result? Courses in ghetto culture—of which Hip-Hop 101 is an extreme example—that reinforce the parochialism of inner-city kids rather than open their minds to broader intellectual worlds.

Hip-Hop 101 epitomizes ed school progressive claptrap in a second respect: its implicit lack of concern toward El Puente students' glaring educational deficiencies. These students have a very tenuous command of basic skills. The school's average SAT scores in 1997—385 in verbal, 363 in math (out of a possible 800 in each)—lagged far behind the city's already abysmal average of 443 in verbal and 464 in math. During a non-traditional mathematics class, the students were stumped by the concept "at least." The phrase "There are at least as many adult men as adult women on a wagon train" means, they agreed, that there could be fewer men than women. The phrase "There is at least one child per family" means "There is no more than one child per family," explained one girl with brown lipstick and long tendrils of hair.

Any school administrator not blinded by the folly of progressivism would put such pupils on a strict regimen of real language study, filling their ears with the best examples of English prose, as well as drilling them on basic math. To spend any class time studying and writing rap lyrics, with their street slang and obscenities—not to mention studying graffiti and deejaying—is an unconscionable diversion from the students' real educational needs.

Unfortunately, Hip-Hop 101 is no aberration. Desperate for "relevance," teachers across the country swamp rap groups such as Run-DMC with requests for lyrics. In New York, many teachers use rap lyrics as a way of "relating to where [the students] are," in the words of a teacher at Park West High School. Graffiti instruction is not yet as widespread, but it's a worrisome portent that Columbia University's Teachers College, the fountainhead of progressive-education gospel for the city and the nation, invited Edgar Miranda to give a presentation on Hip-Hop 101 last December. And El Puente's foundation support—the school has received thousands of dollars from the Annenberg Foundation—gives it the stamp of Establishment approval. Hip-Hop 101, then, provides a troubling benchmark for how far the trivialization of contemporary education can go.

How could a school so lose its moral bearings that it cheerfully teaches illegal activity? Hip-Hop 101's pedigree includes not just progressive pieties but also the 1960s' widespread belief that crime was a quasi-political protest of the oppressed. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, graffiti started metastasizing across New York City, quickly evolving from runic "tags" scrawled on mailboxes and walls to huge multicolored murals covering every inch of the city's subways. And just as quickly, the elites began romanticizing it. *New Yorker* cartoonist Saul Steinberg declared the commission of graffiti a "necessity for entering the art scene." Norman Mailer, America's premier guru of adolescent rebellion, brayed that with each graffiti "hit," "something in the whole scheme of the system gives a death rattle." A *New York* magazine cover story in 1973, called "The Handwriting on the Walls: Should We Love It and Leave It?" cheered the "first genuine teenage street culture since the 1950s" and sneered at the "executive in his camel's hair coat," who cringes in subway cars with windows and interiors wholly blackened by paint. Did graffiti make the working stiff and office clerk feel besieged? So much the better, the elites gloated; they're faceless conformists anyway, whereas graffiti "artists"—they're authentic! Naturally, all the fawning media attention merely increased the incentive to "tag."

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Soon enough, the media discovered that graffiti was part of a bigger, more exciting movement: hip-hop. In the seventies, many of the kids who were spraying subway cars were also staging open-air discos in Bronx parks. They would plug their sound systems into light poles and compete at deejaying—not just playing albums but also producing odd sounds by scraping the record with the stereo stylus. Eventually, they started talking over the instrumental breaks in songs, a practice known as emceeing or rapping.

Competition was fierce. "If the crowd didn't like you, you might get shot at," rapper Grand Master Flash recalled in 1983. Early raps celebrated partying and sexual prowess or railed at ghetto conditions. To accompany the rapping, kids spun and twirled like dervishes in a form of street dance called break dancing or B-boying. Here, too, the line between artistic competition and ordinary street violence was sometimes thin. "A [dance] battle would get you into a fight," former breakdancer Steve ("Mr. Wiggles") Clemente told the *Washington Post* in 1995. "[Crazy Legs, another breakdancer] got his jaw broken. He got jumped, I got jumped. Now we're more mature."

The graffiti vandals, rappers, and B-boys organized themselves into "crews," somewhat less criminal forms of association than gangs. Some ended up break-dancing and spraying graffiti murals at Lincoln Center and the Kennedy Center; most turned out less glamorously. Almost half of all 15-year-old graffiti writers apprehended in 1974 had been arrested three years later for burglary and robbery. Says one survivor of the late 1970s graffiti and break-dancing scene: "[A lot of us] were stickup kids, things like that. We all did our foul stuff also."

In the early 1980s, film crews and reporters descended on Washington Heights and the South Bronx to capture this movement. Sure, graffiti was colorful and break dancing energetic, but what really attracted the media was hip-hop's attitude and style. As rap impresario Bill Adler has explained: "The meaning of [rapper] LL Cool J, whatever his explicit message is, is 'I'm young, I'm black, I don't sing, I don't smile for the camera, I don't wear a tuxedo, and I'm still making stupid dollars.'"

The elites ate up such contempt. Hip-hop, *Time* magazine enthused breathlessly in early 1983, was "black, young, and ineffably, unflappably cool, . . . like spray-painted murals down the side of a New York City subway, or a ghetto blaster carried on a shoulder broadcasting 130 beats a minute all over a Bronx street." *Time* swooned over "rapper flash . . . the jeans, the leathers, the heavy personalized belt buckles, even the jewelry," and tittered knowingly at ski cap "legends like I'D RATHER BE SKIING [that] refer not to snowy slopes but to white mounds of a certain illicit inhalable substance."

Today, rap music has overwhelmed all other aspects of hip-hop culture. Defeated in the subways, spray-painted graffiti has slunk back to walls and telephone booths, its glamour dulled. Break dancing may as well be a minuet, for all its current attraction to teens. Yet hip-hop, defined now almost exclusively as rap and attitude, is stronger than ever. Not only does it generate billions of dollars annually in record, video, and clothing sales, but it puts food on the table of many a professorial home, whose owners reciprocate by conferring on hip-hop the impenetrable jargon of the academy. Sample, courtesy of the University of Pennsylvania's Houston A. Baker Jr., former president of the Modern Language Association: "We meditate the legal 'X' of erasure not in an effort to assume the role of latter-day phenomenologists—but to consider the inversive and brilliant powers of symbolic transformation possessed by African-Americans."

Progressive-education theory, then, may have put Hip-Hop 101's "facilitator," Edgar Miranda, in the classroom, but three decades of graffiti glorification and ghetto romanticization have given him his lines. Miranda is a wiry and articulate 27-year-old, with a narrow face and dark eyes framed by heavy glasses, goatee, and ponytail. His vintage graffiti cant is untouched by the broken-windows thesis or insight into the seriousness of quality-of-life crimes or any of the other advances in our understanding of public misbehavior. Miranda has a personal stake in graffiti glorification. "When

I did graffiti," he recalls nostalgically, "I was making a statement. I was poor and small and grew up on public assistance."

In promoting graffiti, Miranda uses the favored strategies of academic apologists everywhere: false analogy (graffiti is like "hieroglyphics or petroglyphs in Caribbean caves"; "my students are learning an arts discipline, like if I asked them to draw a still life"); romanticization (graffiti is a "cry for notice: 'I'm still here!' "); and changing the subject.

Changing the subject—or the "root cause" strategy—is the most useful ploy. "To talk about graffiti," Miranda says, "you must critically look at the socioeconomic resources of the community." Or: Youths do graffiti because they "don't see themselves in a positive light on the news." (How defacing property will improve youths' image, Miranda doesn't explain.) Some "root causes," however, are taboo. In laying out the deficient "resources" of the community, Miranda observes: "If you give yourself a tour of a New York City housing project, you would find table-hockey tables in the community centers missing the plastic parts." Well, aren't the deprived youths themselves the "root cause" of those missing parts? "You can't solve the problems in one week," Miranda responds philosophically.

Invoking root causes allows Miranda to evade the biggest blind spot in graffiti glorification: the impact on the property owner. Why, I asked him, should a small property owner bear the costs of cleaning up graffiti? "You're missing the larger question," Miranda shot back. "Why are young people painting on this building?" Miranda never answered the smaller question.

Actually, Miranda does have a solution for the small property owner—reach out to youth. Artists are starting to gentrify the area around El Puente. Remember that, according to Miranda and every other graffiti glorifier, graffiti is, above all, artistic expression. And yet, oddly, Williamsburg's new residents don't recognize graffiti vandals as fellow artists. In fact, according to Miranda, they're downright offended when their doors get tagged. One friend of Miranda's, however, "trips out" his fellow artists, Miranda says, because he has the only untagged door on his block. The reason? He has "reached out" to youth. "Young people see these [new residents] as invaders," Miranda explains. Their response: "'What are you doing here?' Ta! Ta! Ta!," Miranda cries, mimicking the blasts from a can of aerosol paint.

But why should the burden be on the property owner to "reach out to youth" as a precondition of unmolested property? Small business owners, in particular, find New York's hostile business climate overwhelming enough; to demand that they also engage in youth outreach to ensure a graffiti-free storefront is extortion. I asked Miranda if his graffiti students would be allowed to tag El Puente Academy. No, he replied—"how we look at it is, they don't tag their own home," and El Puente is like their home. It turns out that graffiti is rich artistic expression as long as it's on someone else's property.

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Miranda may get the opportunity to test his convictions soon, for he is planning to buy a house in Williamsburg. I ask him: If someone tags your house, does that make you an oppressor? "I don't want to get down on the person," he says, beneficently. It would be interesting to know how long his open-mindedness will continue, if local teens decide to "resist the economic conditions of youth" on his front door. For now, however, his graffiti and hip-hop gospel is unsullied by conflicting loyalties.

One day last April, Hip-Hop 101 met in a bright classroom at the top of a narrow staircase. The students sat in a large semicircle, pressed up against the far walls of the room; Miranda, wearing a black Young Lords T-shirt inscribed with the slogan EVERY GENERATION CARRIES THE STRUGGLE FORWARD, lectured in front. Ironically, Miranda is a neat, organized teacher with terrific graphic skills and a fairly strict classroom manner. Rather than putting the students in collaborative groups, he uses a question-and-answer format. Students take exams and write research papers. But there, any similarity with traditional education ends.

Take the exams, for example. These tested the students' knowledge not of history or literature but of graffiti principles. In one, the students had a mere ten minutes to execute a sketch for "roasting" a subway car—a clever simulation, no doubt, of real-world conditions. In another, the students had to produce a more elaborate full-color mural on an 11-by-17-inch stencil of a subway car—like target practice on a human outline. "Points were taken off if they did fill-ins" or violated other graffiti conventions, Miranda explains. That day in April, Miranda individually examined those few students who had actually completed their graffiti assignments ("What are the style, elements, and theme of this piece?"). The students were supposed to write a short essay addressing these questions; few, if any, had done so.

Such academic conventions add up to a "fine arts" course, rather like studying the Renaissance, Miranda claims. Just for the record, it does not. Leaving aside for the moment the all-important question of illegality, graffiti remains, with few exceptions, a crude (if energetic) form of visual expression.

During Miranda's one-on-one student conferences, the rest of the class, directed to practice their individual graffiti tags in their black books, just sat passively, waiting for the next part of the class. That came quickly, since there were so few graffiti murals to examine. Before closing out the section on graffiti, Miranda once again quizzed the class: "When we talked about hip-hop, we talked about its four elements—graffiti, emceeing, B-boying, and deejaying. Who can describe what graffiti is?" "The expression of selves," answered one student. "Artistic expression," chimed in another. Good, they've got it. Time to move on to break dancing.

Either out of good pedagogy or because there is so little substance to Hip-Hop 101, Miranda frequently reviews material from previous classes; evidently, classroom drill, anathema to progressive educators, is permissible for subjects dear to facilitators' hearts. After drawing a lovely freehand map of the Western Hemisphere on the blackboard, Miranda recaps a lecture on the transmission of African culture to the Americas. The students remain a bit confused over geography. Asked why a dance, the *capoiera*, began in Brazil, one student answers that the slaves were going north in the underground railroad. So crammed are today's students with the by-now iconic figures and institutions of the abolitionist era—the only historical figures they've reliably encountered—that these keep popping up in inappropriate places. When Miranda asks for manifestations of African culture in the United States, the students volunteer, correctly enough, songs and spirituals. But then they keep going with the underground railroad, Harriet Tubman, and the code name "Moses"—all only distantly related, if at all, to Africa. Such free associations suggest that what these kids need most is history, not hip-hop, but that is not the agenda here.

From his thumbnail sketch of early African-American culture, Miranda jumps to the present. "How is hip-hop similar to or different from these elements?" he asks. To get the class thinking, he writes "Gangs, Crews and Family" on the board and asks them to respond. Except for the mention of "drugs," "cops," and "fighting," the image of gangs that emerges bears more resemblance to the Elks than to the perpetrators of drive-by shoot-

Debasing the classroom with the most superficial aspects of contemporary culture is no guarantee of student interest.

ings. Family, however, receives the highest marks. As one student explains: "Family is like something you should keep real with. Your gang can only go so far with you; your crew and your family can go all the way with you." Not the ideal endorsement, perhaps, but an endorsement nonetheless.

Next, Miranda quickly traces the emergence of break-dancing crews from street gangs, mentioning in passing the noble, communitarian origins of the Black Panthers and the Young Lords. Then, it's time for that staple of modern education: watching videos. Miranda recycles even these, popping in for quick review two videos that the students have already watched. In the first, a 1983 PBS documentary on graffiti, the camera pans over massive graffiti murals as the cheerful narrator, who sounds as if he just stepped out of a 1960s educational film of the *Better Living Through Chemistry* ilk, extols the hip-hop state of mind he calls "rocking." "For graffiti artists," he explains admiringly, "it's rocking the city with your name on the train; for the B-boys, it's rocking the mike." The scene shifts to a dance floor on which two break-dancing teams compete by writhing and spinning. One boy moons the competition; another finishes his number by grabbing his crotch.

In the next video, a low-budget movie from 1984 called *Wild Style*, a terrified-looking white woman with platinum hair and a string of pearls wanders woodenly through a throbbing black club scene. As a rapper in a turtleneck chants: "I'm proud, I'm proud to be black, you know," the blonde tentatively starts smoking a joint and swaying to the beat. Bing Crosby in blackface could not have come up with a more stereotypical portrayal of blackness.

However devoid such videos are of intellectual content, nothing so fully conveys the educational vacuum that is Hip-Hop 101 as the students' "research" assignments. Miranda had brought into class heartbreakingly neat file folders, filled with carefully copied articles from such fan magazines as *Rap Pages* on such topics as the "neglected but not forgotten West Coast graffiti scene," deejays on the black-run New York radio station Hot 97, and up-and-coming Latino hip-hop. To write their "research paper"—on "pioneering artists in hip-hop"—the students had merely to pick out a few articles and summarize them.

Nothing in this assignment comes remotely close to offering the slightest shred of education. Miranda's students may sense, however remotely, that they are being shortchanged. I asked a student who was sitting slumped in his chair why he had not responded to Miranda's call to pick up some articles. "I got those magazines in my house, too," he answered, contemptuously.

Now what is the payoff from this craven capitulation to anti-intellectualism? Virtually nothing. Student-centered education promises to deliver excited, involved learners. None of those was in evidence at Hip-Hop 101. Students slouch in their chairs, eyes glazed, though at least they are not disruptive. No one bothers to open a notebook, much less take notes. Miranda might as well be translating Sallust, for all the "active learning" going on. And students still hand in assignments late and incomplete.

So the bargain has proved hollow. Progressive educators jettison the great body of Western learning in a desperate bid for students' attention, only to find the same blank looks and poor performance said to be the natural outcome of dead languages and white male Anglo-European authors. Debasing the classroom with the most superficial aspects of contemporary culture is no guarantee of student interest.

What Hip-Hop 101 has guaranteed, however, is a future supply of graffiti "artists" in the city. El Puente officially denies this. Alpha Anderson, the school's courtly assistant principal, says quite sincerely: "I don't think anyone has the right to spray-paint your property; we don't advocate that." Miranda is far less straightforward: "I'm not telling them what to do and what not to do." Such calculated neutrality is hardly convincing. But even if Miranda had tried to discourage real-world application of his lessons, it is preposterous to think that a course lionizing graffiti vandals will have no effect on its students' graffiti production.

Miranda's refusal to intervene in his students' extracurricular activities has an unimpeachable source: progressive-education ideology. "Following [Marxist pedagogue Paolo] Freire, I don't have the power to tell a young person what to do and not to do," Miranda asserts. "I can give them the tools"—an unfortunate image—"and they find the path. If I tell a child, 'don't, don't, don't,' they'll say, 'Why always No?'" But the role of a teacher, despite progressive theory, is precisely to exercise intellectual and moral guidance; once that is abdicated, education is not possible.

Well, Miranda may not care to find out, but how are his students applying their knowledge of graffiti principles? I ask a tall boy in a big jacket, who has been sitting low in his seat, legs splayed, throughout the class, to show me his black book. It is filled with scribbles resembling tangled fishing wire. "I've been practicing my Gs," he explains. Like many of the class's budding graffiti "artists," "Jigga" (the boy's *nom de can*) is modest about his accomplishments. "I just started with graffiti—on phones," he says, "but I'm not a pro yet." Who decides if you're a pro? I ask him. "If you will look corny, [then you're not a pro]," he replies. But who judges? "Yourself and what people say about your pieces." Jigga knows what he needs to do to become more professional: "More style, more graphics. When you write bubble letters, it's wack, it's corny. You have to be [more] creative."

Like any downtown artist, Jigga seeks exposure. "You go writing everywhere, because the more you get around, the more famous you are." Are there any samples of his work in this neighborhood? I ask. He nods. Jigga obviously does not shrink from competition, since the area around El Puente is already tagged to saturation.

Another boy has not yet made his professional debut, but he intends to. "You take a plain wall and make it look so magnificent," he says dreamily. Like Jigga, this husky boy knows his artistic limits: "When I first started [practicing], it was kind of corny, but I'm getting better at it. I want feedback." Where will he debut? "Well, I live on Coney Island," he hints.

Not all Miranda's students share such artistic ambition; some, in fact, repudiate the message that graffiti is art. One baby-faced boy, who got 100 on his subway mural exam, says he doesn't like graffiti: "It's just messin' up other people's property." But many students are convinced that doing graffiti represents a career path. "These are established artists," a boy with a nascent mustache tells me. "If a kid wants to start developing himself, they do travel, if they make it big." Another adds: "People do get hired. Pepsi . . . Marvel . . . and a clothes line, PMB, was started by three graffiti artists."

Youth culture can be cruel, however. For all Miranda's street talk and cool demeanor, he is already obsolete. One student, asked what he thought of the class, responds witheringly: "I'm not going to comment. I expected to learn how to professionalize on the lettering, but I already knew everything." Another student agrees: "Most of the stuff in the class I already knew. It was more like a refresher." There is a lesson here for anyone who dares teach popular culture to teenagers: don't bother—you'll be behind before you even begin.

Hip-Hop 101 is on the same spectrum as other progressive-ed nostrums, not in a world of its own. That a school could embrace a practice both illegal and destructive of the city's spirit is a troubling indication of how far the educational system has lost its bearings. Desperate to show "sensitivity" to minority students and to create subjects in which they can unequivocally excel, schools have cast aside responsibility for academic and moral education. The decision to teach graffiti is also the natural outcome of the inclusion of contemporary popular culture in the curriculum. Once you shrink from distinguishing Montaigne from Madonna, it becomes indefensible to make distinctions within low culture and exclude aspects of it that some benighted segments of society deem illegal.

El Puente's teachers and administrators are clearly well-meaning, but they could not have designed a course more likely to keep their students down than Hip-Hop 101. Meretricious and evanescent, hip-hop "culture" is simply not something that schools should waste a single second on when facing children as ignorant of the wider world as El Puente's are. But cutting-edge educators are sleepwalking through the apocalypse, seemingly indifferent to the educational meltdown we face.

The New New Math

By Martin Gardner

Multicultural and Gender Equity in the Mathematics Classroom: The Gift of Diversity (1997 Yearbook)
edited by Janet Trentacosta and Margaret J. Kenney 248 pages, $22.00 (hardcover) published by National Council of Teachers of Mathematics

Focus on Algebra: An Integrated Approach
by Randall I. Charles and Alba Gonzalez Thompson , et al. 843 pages, $56.00 (hardcover) published by Addison-Wesley

Life by the Numbers: Math As You've Never Seen It Before
narrated by Danny Glover and Seven boxed videotapes produced by WQED, Pittsburgh $129.00

Surveys have shown for many decades that the mathematical skills of American high school students lag far behind those of their counterparts in Japan, Korea, Singapore, and many European countries. In the United States whites do better than blacks, Hispanics, and Native Americans. Males outscore females. Students from high socioeconomic backgrounds do better than those from lower strata.

These are troubling statistics because, in an advanced technological society such as ours, a firm grasp of basic mathematics is increasingly essential for better-paying jobs. Something clearly is wrong with how math is being taught in pre-college grades, but what?

In the late 1960s the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) began to promote a reform movement called the New Math. In an effort to give students insight into why arithmetic works, it placed a heavy emphasis on set theory, congruence arithmetic, and the use of number bases other than ten. Children were forbidden to call, say, 7 a "number." It was a "numeral" that symbolized a number. The result was enormous confusion on the part of pupils, teachers, and parents. The New Math fad faded after strong attacks by the physicist Richard Feynman and others. The final blow was administered by the mathematician Morris Kline's 1973 best seller *Why Johnny Can't Add: The Failure of the New Math.*

Recently, the NCTM, having learned little from its New Math fiasco, has once more been backing another reform movement that goes by such names as the new new math, whole math, fuzzy math, standards math, and rain forest math. Like the old New Math, it is creating a ferment among teachers and parents, especially in California, where it first caught on. It is estimated that about half of all pre-college mathematics in the United States is now being taught by teachers trained in fuzzy math. The new fad is heavily influenced by multiculturalism, environmentalism, and feminism. These trends get much attention in the twenty-eight papers contributed to the NCTM's 1997 yearbook, *Multicultural and Gender Equity in the Mathematics Classroom: The Gift of Diversity.*

It is hard to fault most of this book's advice, even though most of the teachers who wrote its chapters express themselves in mind-numbing jargon. "Multiculturalism" and "equity" are the book's most-used buzzwords. The word "equity," which simply means treating all ethnic groups equally, and not favoring one gender over another, must appear in the book a thousand times. A typical sentence opens Chapter Eleven: "Feminist pedagogy can be an important part of building a gender-equitable multicultural classroom environment." Over and over again teachers are reminded that if they suspect blacks and females are less capable of understanding math than Caucasian males, their behavior is sure to subtly reinforce such beliefs among the students themselves, or what one teacher calls, in the prescribed jargon, a student's "internalized self-image."

"Ethnomathematics" is another popular word. It refers to math as practiced by cultures other than Western, especially among primitive African tribes. A book much admired by fuzzy-math teachers is Marcia Ascher's Ethnomathematics: A Multicultural View of Mathematical Ideas (1991).[1] "Critical-mathematical literacy" is an even longer jawbreaker. It appears in the NCTM yearbook as a term for the ability to interpret statistics correctly.

Knowing how pre-industrial cultures, both ancient and modern, handled mathematical concepts may be ofhistorical interest, but one must keep in mind that mathematics, like science, is a cumulative process that advances steadily by uncovering truths that are everywhere the same. Native tribes may symbolize numbers by using different base systems, but the numbers behind the symbols are identical. Two elephants plus two elephants makes four elephants in every African tribe, and the arithmetic of these cultures is a miniscule portion of the vast jungle of modern mathematics. A Chinese mathematician is no more concerned with ancient Chinese mathematics, remarkable though it was, than a Western physicist is concerned with the physics of Aristotle.

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[1] Textbooks emphasizing multiculturalism are proliferating rapidly. Here are a few: *Africa Counts: Number and Pattern in African Culture*, by Claudia Zaslavsky (Lawrence Hill, 1997); *Multiculturalism in Mathematics, Science and Technology*, by Miriam Barrios-Chacon and Others (Addison-Wesley, 1993); *Multicultural Mathematics: Teaching Mathematics from a Global Perspective*, by David Nelson, George Gheverghese Joseph, and Julian Williams (Oxford University Press, 1993); *Teaching with a Multicultural Perspective: A Practical Guide*, by Leonard Davidman and Patricia T. Davidman (Perseus, 1996). Striking multicultural math posters are available from teaching supply houses.

The New York Review of Books, September 24, 1998

Fuzzy-math teachers are urged by contributors to the yearbook to cut down on lecturing to passive listeners. No longer are they to play the role of "sage on stage." They are the "guide on the side." Classes are divided into small groups of students who cooperate in finding solutions to "open-ended" problems by trial and error. This is called "interactive learning." The use of calculators is encouraged, along with such visual aids as counters, geometrical models, geoboards, wax paper (for folding conic section curves), tiles of different colors and shapes, and other devices. Getting a correct answer is considered less important than shrewd guesses based on insights, hence the term "fuzzy math." Formal proofs are downgraded.

No one can deny the usefulness of visual aids.Teachers have known for centuries that the best way to teach arithmetic to small children is by letting them "interact" with counters. Each counter models anything that retains its identityan apple, cow, person, star. What's the sum of 5 and 2? A girl who knows how to count moves into a pile five counters, then two more, and counts the heap as seven. Suppose she first moves two, then five. Does it make a difference? Similar procedures teach subtraction, multiplication, and division.

After a few days of counter playing it has been traditional for children to memorize the addition table to at least 9. Later they learn the multiplication table to at least 10. "Hands-on" learning first, then rote learning. Unfortunately, some far-out enthusiasts of new new math reject anything resembling what they call "drill and kill" memorizing. The results, of course, are adults who can't multiply 12 by 12 without reaching for a calculator.

Aside from its jargon, another objectionable feature of the yearbook is that its contributors seem wholly unaware that the best way to keep students awake is to introduce recreational material which they perceive as fun. Such material includes games, puzzles, magic tricks, fallacies, and paradoxes. For example, determining whether the first or second player can always win at tick-tack-toe, or whether the game is a draw if each player makes the best moves, is an excellent way to introduce symmetry, combinatorics, graph theory, and game theory. Because all children know the game, it ties strongly into their experience.

For what the yearbook likes to call a "cognitively challenging" task, give each child a sheet with a checkerboard on it. Have each of them cut off two opposite corner squares. Can the remaining sixty-two squares be covered by thirty-one dominoes? After a group finds it impossible, see how long it takes for someone to come up with the beautiful parity (odd-even) proof of impossibility.

If new new math teachers are aware of such elegant puzzles, and there are thousands, there is no hint of it in the yearbook. This is hard to understand in view of such best-selling textbooks as Harold Jacobs's *Mathematics: A Human Endeavor* (1970, third edition, 1994), which has a great deal of recreational material; *Mathematics: Problem Solving Through Recreational Mathematics*, a textbook by Bonnie Averbach and Orin Chein (1980); and scores of recent books on entertaining math by eminent mathematicians.

I seldom agree with the conservative political views of Lynne Cheney, but when she criticized extreme aspects of the new new math on the Op Ed page of *The New York Times* on August 11, 1997,[2] I found myself cheering. As Cheney points out, at the heart of fuzzy-math teaching is the practice of dividing students into small groups, then letting them discover answers to problems without being taught how to find them. For example, teachers traditionally introduced the Pythagorean theorem by drawing a right triangle on the blackboard, adding squares on its sides, and then explaining, perhaps even proving, that the area of the largest square exactly equals the combined areas of the two smaller squares.

According to fuzzy math, this is a terrible way to teach the theorem. Students must be allowed to discover it for themselves. As Cheney describes it, they cut from graph paper squares with sides ranging from two to fifteen units. (Such pieces are known as "manipulatives.") Then they play the following "game." Using the edges of the squares, they form triangles of various shapes. The "winner" is the first to discover that if the area of one square exactly equals the combined areas of the other two squares, the triangle must have a right angle with the largest square on its hypotenuse. For example, a triangle of sides 3,4,5. Students who never discover the theorem are said to have "lost" the game. In this manner, with no help from teacher, the children are supposed to discover that with right triangles a2+b2=c2.

"Constructivism" is the term for this kind of learning. It may take a group several days to "construct" the Pythagorean theorem. Even worse, the paper game may bore a group of students more than hearing a good teacher explain the theorem on the blackboard.

One of the harshest critics of fuzzy math is the writer John Leo, whose article on the subject, "That So-Called Pythagoras," was published last year in *US News and World Report* (May 26, 1997). (His title springs from a reference he found in a book on ethnomathematics to "the so-called Pythagorean theorem.") Leo tells of Marianne Jennings, a professor at Arizona State University, whose daughter was getting an A in algebra but had no notion of how to solve an equation. After obtaining a copy of her daughter's textbook, Jennings soon understood why.

Here is how Leo describes this book:

> It includes Maya Angelou's poetry, pictures of President Clinton and Mali wood -carvings, lectures on what environmental sinners we all are and photos of students with names such as Taktuk and Esteban

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[2] See also the letters in *The New York Times* of August 17, 1997, and an earlier article by Cheney in the *Weekly Standard* (August 4, 1997).

"who offer my daughter thoughts on life." It also contains praise for the wife of Pythagoras, father of the Pythagorean theorem, and asks students such mathematical brain teasers as "What role should zoos play in our society?" However, equations don't show up until Page 165, and the first solution of a linear equation, which comes on Page 218, is reached by guessing and checking.

Romesh Ratnesar's article "This is Math?" (*Time*, August 25, 1997) also criticizes the new new math. It describes fifth-graders who were asked how many handshakes would occur if everyone in the class shook hands with everyone else. At the end of an hour, no group had the answer. Unfazed, the teacher said they would be trying again after lunch. Professor Jennings makes another appearance. She told Ratnesar that she became angry and worried when she saw her daughter use her calculator to determine 10 percent of 470.

Curious about her daughter's textbook, which is now widely used, I finally obtained a copy by paying a bookstore $59.92. Titled Focus on *Algebra: An Integrated Approach*, this huge text contains 843 pages and weighs close to four pounds. (In Japan, the average math textbook is two hundred pages.) It is impossible to imagine a sharper contrast with an algebra textbook of fifty years ago.

"Integrated" in the subtitle has two meanings.

(1) Instead of being limited to algebra, the book rangesall over the math scene with material on geometry, combinatorics, probability, statistics, number theory, functions, matrices, and scatter graphs, and of course the constant use of calculators and graphers. Fifty years ago high school math was given in two classes, one on algebra, one on geometry. Today's classes are "integrated" mixtures.

(2) The book is carefully integrated with respect to gender and to ethnicity, with photographs of girls and women equal in number to photographs of boys and men. Faces of blacks and whites are similarly equal, though I noticed few faces of Asians.

On the positive side is the book's lavish use of color. Only a few pages lack full-color photos and drawings, all with eye-catching layouts. When it comes to actual mathematics the text is for the most part clear and accurate, with a strong emphasis on understanding why procedures work, and on inducements to think creatively. "After all," the text says on its first page, "what good is it to solve an equation if it is the wrong equation?" The trouble is that the book's mathematical content is often hard to find in the midst of material that has no clear connection to mathematics.

Not having taught mathematics myself, I have no opinion about the value of students working in small groups as opposed to sitting and listening to a teacher talk. Nor have I found research studies that make a decisive case in favor of either method. Clearly a great deal depends on the qualities of particular teachers, and these would be hard to appraise in any survey. The authors justify the group approach by saying it anticipates the workplaces in which students will find themselves as adults. John Donne's remark about how no man is an island is quoted. The book's first "exercise" is a question: "In general, do you prefer to work alone or in groups?"

An emphasis on ethnic and gender equity is, of course, admirable, though in this textbook it seems overdone. For example, twelve faces of boys and girls of mixed ethnicity reappear in pairs throughout the pages. Each has something to say. "Taktuk thinks..." is followed with "Esteban thinks...," "Kirti thinks..." is followed by what "Keisha thinks...," and so on. These pairings become mechanical and predictable.

The book jumps all over the place, with transitions as abrupt as the dream episodes of Alice in Wonderland. I think most students would find this confusing. Eight full pages are devoted to statements by adult professionals, with their photographs. Each statement opens with a sentence about whether they liked or disliked math in high school, followed by generally banal remarks. For example, Diana Garcia-Prichard, a chemist, writes: "I liked math in high school because all the problems had answers. Math is part of literacy and the framework of science. For instance, film speed depends on chemical reactions. I use math to model problems and design experiments. I like getting results that I can publish and share." Presumably such statements are intended to convince students that math will be useful later on in life.

Many of the book's exercises are trivial. For example, on page 20 students are asked to play forward and backward a VCR tape of a skier, then answer the question: "How will this affect the way the skier appears to move?" On page 11: "A circle graph represents 180 kittens. What does ¼ of the circle represent?" (Answer, to be found in the back of the book: 45.) A chapter on "the language of algebra" opens with a page on the origin of such phrases as "the lion's share," "the boondocks," and "not worth his salt." It is not clear what this has to do with algebra.

Many pictures have only a slim relation to the text. Magritte's painting of a green apple floating in front of a man's face accompanies some problems about apples. Van Gogh's self portrait is alongside a problem about the heights and widths of canvases. A picture of the Beatles accompanies a problem about taxes only because of the Beatles' song "Taxman." My favorite irrelevant picture shows Maya Angelou talking to President Clinton. Beside it is the following extract from one of her prose poems:

Lift up your eyes upon
This day breaking for you
Give birth again
Women, Children, Men,
Take it into the palm of your hands.
Mold it into the shape of your most
Private need. Sculpt it into
The image of your most public self.

Why is this quoted? Because the "parallel" phrases shown underlined are similar to parallel lines in geometry! Is this intended to "integrate" geometry and poetry?

The book is much concerned with how the environment is being polluted. Protecting the environment is obviously a good cause, but here its connection with learning math is often oblique, if not arbitrary. A chapter on functions opens with a page headed "Unstable Domain." Its first question is "What other kinds of pollution besides air pollution might threaten our planet?" Page 350 has a picture of crude oil being poured over a model of the earth. It accompanies a set of questions relating to the way improper disposals of oil are contaminating ground water.

A page headlined "Hot Stuff" shows three kinds of peppers to illustrate how they are used in cooking. Two of the "exercises" are: "The chili cook-off raises money for charity. Describe some ways the organizers could raise money in the cook-off," and "How would you set up a hotness scale for peppers?" This page introduces a chapter on how to solve linear equations. Another section on equations opens with pictures of zoo animals. It discusses what can be done to prevent species from becoming extinct. The first question is "What role should zoos play in today's society?" The book's index, under the entry "Animal study and care," lists thirty-two page references.

A section on mathematical inequalities is preceded by a page on how Mary Rodas became vice-president of a toy company, and how Linda Johnson Rice found acreative way to market Ebon, cosmetics for black women. Under a photo of a smiling Mary, the firstquestions are: "Would you like to own your own business someday? Why or why not?"

On page 67, a picture of Toni Morrison is used to illustrate a problem about how many ways four objects can be placed in a row. The text then introduces four students who each read an excerpt from something Morrison has written. In how many different orders, the text asks, can the four excerpts be read? A man from Mysore, India, who creates shadow pictures on the wall with his fingers is featured on page 421. What this has to with the following section on solving systems of inequalities is not evident. A photo of Alice Walker on page 469 illustrates the question: "Is the time it takes to read an Alice Walker novel always a function of the number of pages?" This and other such references give the impression that well-known writers are being dragged into the text.

The most outrageous page it opens a section on linear functions concerns the Dogon culture of West Africa. Students are told that this primitive tribe, without the aid of telescopes, discovered that Jupiter has satellites, that Saturn has rings, and that an invisible star of great density orbits Sirius once every fifty years. Presumably the Dogon had supernormal powers. However, it has long been known that the Dogon made no such discoveries. They merely learned these astronomical facts from missionaries and other Western visitors.[3]

Like the authors of the NCTM yearbook, those who fashioned this huge textbook seem wholly uninterested in recreational material. The book's only magic trick (page 246) is a stale, utterly trivial way to guess a number. Although strongly favoring the use of calculators, the authors don't seem aware that the hundreds of amazing number tricks that can be done with them provide excellent exercises. A child can learn a lot of significant number theory in discovering why they work. None is in the book.

An old brain-teaser involves a glass of wine and a glass of water. A drop is taken from the wine and added to the water. The water is stirred, then a drop of the mixture goes back to the wine. Is there now more water in the wine than wine in the water, or vice versa? The surprising answer is that the two amounts are precisely equal.

Students will be fascinated by the way this principle can be modeled with a deck of cards. Divide the deck in half, one half consisting of all the red cards, the other half consisting of all the black cards. Take as many cards as you like from the red (wine) half and insert them anywhere among the blacks (water). Shuffle the black half. From it remove from anywhere the same number of cards you took from the reds and put them back among the reds. You'll find the number of blacks among the reds is exactly the same as the number of reds among the blacks. Students will enjoy proving that this is always the case. But will it work if the two starting portions of the deck are unequal? (Yes. It doesn't matter if the two glasses in the brain teaser are not the same size; nor does it matter how many cards are in the black and red piles.)

This secondary math textbook has an index that is not very helpful. What value are more than 180 page references for the entry "Science"? What use is a similar quantity of page numbers for the entry "Industry"? WQED's boxed set of seven videotapes, *Life by the Numbers*, was funded mainly by the National Science Foundation and the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation. The photography is excellent. There are scenes of men and women mathematicians seated at computer consoles, or driving a car, or walking down a street or through the woods. There are many close-ups of their faces, dazzling glimpses of mountains and skyscrapers, baseball games, martial arts contests, blossoming flowers, wild animals, and everything imaginable that has little to do with math. The tapes rate high on special effects, low on mathematical content.

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[3] On the myth of Dogon astronomy, see Carl Sagan, *Broca's Brain* (Random House, 1979), pp. 63-64, and Chapter Six; Ian Ridpath, "Investigating the Sirius 'Mystery,'" in *The Skeptical Inquirer*, Vol. 3 (Fall 1978), pp. 56-62; and Terence Hines, *Pseudoscience and the Paranormal Prometheus Books*, 1988), pp. 216-219.

The seventh tape covers a typical new new math class. To discover that the longer a pendulum, the slower its swing, students tie weights to the ends of string and swing the weights back and forth while other students keep charts of string lengths and pendulum periods. After several days they learn that the period of a pendulum is a function of its length. This discovery enables them to calculate whether the victim in Poe's horror story "The Pit and the Pendulum" has enough time to escape from the huge pendulum which threatens to cut him in half as it swings lower and lower over his reclining body. It is assumed that because students have fun swinging weights they will remember the function better than if a teacher takes a few minutes to demonstrate it by swinging a weight and slowly lengthening the string. One of the most telling attacks on new new math is Bernadette Kelly's article "Deja Vu? The New 'New Math,'" in the professional journal Effective School Practices (Spring 1994). Kelly summarizes four case studies by four supporters of fuzzy math in which they report on four fifth-grade teachers.[4] Two of the teachers, called Sandra and Valerie, are enthusiastic users of new new math techniques. The other two teachers use traditional methods.

Sandra was very good at getting students to cooperate in groups. However, in one exercise she told students that one could obtain the perimeter of a rectangular field by multiplying its length by its width! In another project she calculated the volume of a sandbox by multiplying together its length and width in yards, then multiplying the product by the box's height in feet! In an interview, Sandra said that while working on the sand box problem her pupils asked what a cubic foot was. "You know the thing is that I couldn't really answer that question. Then I thought and thought, then I remembered how to measure a cube." Neither Sandra nor her students were ever aware of her two huge mistakes. In spite of these errors, the author of the article about her said she was an "exemplary teacher." Sandra is praised for getting her students to enjoy their cooperative efforts to solve problems "in the context of real world situations." Finding a correct answer was less important than having fun in working on the problem.

Valerie made an equally astonishing blunder. The task was to determine the average number of times her thirty students had eaten ice cream over a period of eight days. This was "solved," by dividing 30 by 8, to get 3.75, which Valerie rounded up to 4! As with Sandra, neither Valerie nor her students ever became aware that they obtained a totally wrong answer. Nevertheless, the author of the paper about her forgives her mistake on the grounds that she had succeeded so well in getting her students to work on a problem in the context of their experience. Moreover, the work had impressed on the students the "usefulness and relevance of averages." No matter that they completely failed to find an average.

As for Jim and Karen, the two teachers who used more traditional methods, the authors of the case studies are unimpressed by their students having scored high on tests. Both are castigated for failing to appreciate the methods of the new new math. What is deplorable, as Bernadette Kelly's article points out, is not so much that the case studies revealed the incompetence of two teachers, who come through as ignoramuses, as the authors' praise of Sandra and Valerie for finding ways to get their pupils working joyfully on problems. Little wonder that new new math is called fuzzy. Insights are deemed significant even when they are wrong.

The mathematician Sherman Stein, in his 1996 book *Strength in Numbers*, devotes a chapter to a history of math reform movements. His hopes for the new new math are dim. "I am disturbed," he writes,

> that the authors of the [new new math books] do not cite any pilot project or any school district as a model to show that their goals can be achieved in the real world. That means that they are proposing to change the way an entire generation learns mathematics without checking the feasibility of their recommendations. A manufacturer introduces a new soap with more care, first testing its reception in a few stores or towns before committing to mass production.

But evaluating the efficacy of fuzzy math will not be easy. Too many variables are involved, including the skill of teachers and the educational background of parents, to mention only two. A glaring example of how research can be biased is provided by a recent testing of pre-college math students around the world by the Third International Mathematics and Science Study.

Results announced last February revealed that American students did better than students in just two other countries, Cyprus and South Africa. A cartoon in *The New York Times* (March 8) showed a car's bumper sticker that said "My kid's math scores beat kids in Cyprus and South Africa." Inside the car a father is giving a thumbs-up sign. These statistics are worthless. In many cases the students in a foreign country were much older than students here at the same grade level. More significantly, in most foreign nations students in early grades who show no aptitude for math are sent off to trade schools or to jobs, if they can find them. In the US such students are required to continue attending high school. Obviously our high school students will do less well on math tests than students in countries where poor students are quickly moved out of the system.

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[4] R.T. Putnam, R.M. Heaton, R.S. Prewat, and J. Remillard, "Teaching Mathematics For Understanding," in

Elementary School Journal, Vol. 93 (1992), pp. 213-228.

Although we lack clear, systematic evidence that methods of fuzzy math are inferior to older methods, education officials in California, the nation's largest customer for math textbooks, have suddenly turned against the new new math. The change in state policy was mainly in response to the outrage of parents who complained that their children were unable to do the simplest arithmetical calculations. Their outrage was backed by many top mathematicians and scientists. Michael McKeown, for example, a distinguished molecular biologist at the Salk Institute, heads a parental group called Mathematically Correct. "We're not opposed to teaching concepts," he told *Newsweek* ("Subtracting the New Math," December 15, 1997). "I am opposed to failing to give a kid tools to solve a problem."

In a vote of ten to zero (one person abstained) the eleven members of California's Board of Education recommended this spring a broad return to basics in math teaching. The decision is sure to have an effect in other states. The board said students should learn the multiplication table by the end of the third grade, and that fourth- graders should know how to do long division without consulting a calculator. It banned the use of calculators on state tests. Teachers were urged not to introduce calculators before grade six.

Defenders of fuzzy math are, of course, dismayed. They branded the board's decisions a product of nostalgia, and a contribution to our country's dumbing down. The National Science Foundation, which has given more than $50 million to California districts for research on new math teaching, is furious. It has threatened to withdraw further funding to any California district that adopts the board's recommendations.

The conflict is bitter and far from over. It may be many years before it becomes clear how to sift out from the new new math what is valuable while retaining worthy aspects of older teaching methods.[5] My own opinion is that the most important question concerning the teaching of math is not how big and colorful textbooks are, how many visual aids are used, how the classroom is physically arranged, or even what methods are used in it. The greatest threat to good math teaching is surely the low pay that keeps so many excellent teachers and potential teachers out of our schools. What matters more than anything else is having trained teachers who understand and love mathematics, and are capable of communicating its mystery and beauty to their pupils.

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[5] That the new new math has positive aspects goes without saying. It is important that students understand the basic concepts of math and not just memorize procedures that work; and to give students such conceptual understanding teachers themselves must have such understanding. This is the theme of a recent monograph, *Middle Grade Teachers' Mathematical Knowledge and Its Relationship to Instruction*, by Judith Sowder, Randolph Philipp, Barbara Armstrong, and Bonnie Schappelle (State University of New York, 1998). The monograph reports on a two-year investigation of five teachers, with a primary emphasis on how they taught fractions. Why, for example, in dividing one fraction by another do you flip upside down the divisor fraction, then multiply the numerators and denominators? Should teachers be content with letting students accept this as a trick that works like magic, or try to answer a student who asks, "Why is this division?" The monograph defends the admirable aspects of math reform without going to fuzzy-math extremes.

Testimony of Stan Metzenberg, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of Biology
California State University Northridge

Before the United States House of Representatives
Committee on Science, Subcommittee on Basic Research
July 23, 1998

I am very pleased and honored to have this opportunity to speak to you today, about the effects of the educational reform movement on science education in this country.

My name is Stan Metzenberg, and I'm an Assistant Professor of Biology at California State University Northridge. The university is located in the San Fernando Valley, and draws its student population from the greater Los Angeles area. We have a state mandate to accept the top third of graduating high school seniors, but within that population of entering freshmen we find that two thirds are in need of immediate remedial education in mathematics or English. I have the dubious distinction of being at a second-tier institution that is taking in some of the worst-prepared students in California; a state that has nearly the worst-prepared students in the United States; a nation that has nearly the worst-prepared students in the world.

Despite the lack of college-preparedness of our typical freshman, California State University Northridge is successful in providing students with an exceptional education. I am also a laboratory scientist, as well as an educator, and my students and I conduct NIH-supported research in molecular parasitology. Thanks to the largesse of the NIH and the NSF, many non-Ph.D.-granting institutions are similarly able to bring undergraduate students into the laboratory to conduct basic research.

I became interested in K-12 education, in part because of the appalling lack of college-preparedness of students graduating from the Los Angeles Unified School District. For the past six months, I have served as a consultant to a California Commission developing academic content standards in science. Dr. Glenn T. Seaborg is Chair of the Science Committee for the Academic Standards Commission, and has a long and distinguished career as both a scientist and advocate for improving K-12 education. While assisting the Commission in the preparation of the California Science Standards, I became immersed in The National Science Education Standards, and the AAAS Benchmarks for Science Literacy. These two documents are of extraordinary importance to your hearings today, as they serve as the philosophical basis or 'cornerstone' for the NSF Systemic Initiatives.

The message I bring to you today is that the NSF has chosen the wrong path in endorsing these documents. They have set a standard of achievement for students that is shockingly low, and federal funding is helping to create an entire generation of scientific illiterates. The often quoted adage 'Less is More' brings little comfort. As any thinking person knows, and as the facts demonstrate, less is not more it is less!

It is often said erroneously, that the AAAS Benchmarks and National Science Education Standards represent the widespread consensus of scientists and educators as to what all high school graduates need, to achieve reasonable literacy in science. In fact, there is not consensus. Although there are some well-meaning scientists who stand behind these documents, the documents were primarily written by education specialists rather than scientists, and the sentiment of most scientists has been one of indifference rather than consensus. Given that only about a fifth of our research grant applications are funded, there should be no surprise that scientists only grudgingly commit time to activities outside of the lab.

In addition to this misleading use of the word "consensus", it is also said with some frequency that the National Science Education Standards and AAAS Benchmarks are based on scholarly research on how students learn, and what is developmentally appropriate for all students to learn at a given age. In the National Science Education Standards (p. 110) for example, it is stated that there exists 'an obligation to develop content standards that appropriately represent the developmental and learning abilities of students.' The prevailing philosophy among education specialists is that a teacher does harm to students by introducing material that is not developmentally appropriate. I have undertaken a study of the literature cited in the AAAS Benchmarks to ask what is the research on learning abilities of students, and is it applicable to our students?

What I have found is quite disturbing. The National Science Education Standards and AAAS Benchmarks are based on the flimsiest excuse for research that I have ever encountered. Fewer than half of the papers covering student learning in physical, earth, and life sciences are in peer-reviewed publications. In fact quite a few of the references are to unpublished talks that were presented at education meetings. This is certainly the lowest form of review, since you and I can't read what was said or even know if the audience clapped politely after the speaker had finished. There are numerous instances where the AAAS Benchmarks misstate the methodology or findings in a paper, claiming that the study was performed on high school students for example, when the paper indicates it was performed on college students.

Most of the peer-reviewed research was not done in the United States at all, but rather in countries such as England, Australia, Germany, and Israel. The AAAS Benchmarks and National Science Education Standards make a tremendous leap of faith in assuming that children in different countries have similar learning stages. Many of the cited papers represent studies conducted on small numbers of students, on the order of 30 to 100, who in many cases were not chosen randomly from an age cohort. It is often the case that the very conclusions of the paper hinge on the responses of a dozen or fewer students, who had not even received formal instruction in the material upon which they were being questioned. It is a sobering thought that educational policy in the United States could be influenced by a few 7-year olds growing up in another country, but this is in fact what has happened.

I will cite three specific example from the AAAS Benchmarks research base, reflecting either a poor research methodology, a possible lack of scientific understanding on the part of the educational researcher, or a significant anti-science bias. There are in total, only forty-three peer-reviewed papers cited in the physical, earth and life sciences sections of the AAAS Benchmarks, and I have managed to obtain and read about thirty-five of them. The three papers I will cite are fairly typical examples.

Childrens understanding of inherited traits.

In discussing childrens understanding of inherited traits, the following statements are presented in the two national standards documents:

> "...students might hold some naive thoughts about inheritance, including the belief that traits are inherited from only one parent..." NSES p. 128

> "Some students believe that traits are inherited from only one of the parents...It may not be until the end of the 5th grade that some students can use arguments based on chance to predict the outcome of inherited characteristics from observing those characteristics in the parents." AAAS Benchmarks p. 341

What is the research that would support such a statement? The cited paper by Kargbo et al. (Journal of Biological Education 14:138-146) reports on the results of half-hour interviews with 32 Canadian students, with ages ranging from 7 to 13. Twelve of the subjects were under the age of ten, and itís astonishing that such a small group could serve as the basis for the aforementioned statement in the AAAS Benchmarks, on the cognitive limitations of students before the end of 5th grade.

Students were asked the following question (Ibid. Table 4, p. 142): "If a white male dog and a black female dog have six puppies, what colour would the puppies be?" First of all, geneticists know that this is a question that is impossible to answer with the information provided. The students nonetheless gamely answer, guessing that the puppies would be black or some combination of black and white. None of the younger students guessed that the puppies would be all white, which may indicate that they thought the black pigment in the mothers coat would overcome in some way the absence of pigment in the father's coat. It 's a good guess.

The next question in the interview was: "Which one of the parent dogs do you think will give more colour to the puppies?" Most young students said the mother dog, remembering perhaps that the father dog was white and had no color. The authors concluded from these interviews that it was clear "...that a large number of the children thought the mother would contribute more to the genetic make-up of the offspring than the father." (Ibid. p. 142). This is obviously not a fair conclusion, given the context: the students were presented with a black mother dog and white father dog and asked which would contribute more color.

This is an example of poor research design. I wish I could say it was unusual, but in fact this type of error is present in nearly every cited paper. What is most harmful in this example is the statement in the Benchmarks about what children cannot understand before the end of the 5th grade.

Learning follows from instruction, after all. The fact that children have misconceptions prior to instruction should not be surprising, nor should it prevent us from attempting to teach them the concepts. The Benchmarks and National Science Standards are full of unscholarly admonishments about what children cannot learn at an early age. By thoughtlessly building national policy around research of this type, we have tremendously underestimated our children's capacity to learn.

Childrens understanding of cooling objects.

My second example, on childrens understanding of cooling objects, illustrates a case where the students being interviewed appear to know more about the science than they are being given credit for. Kesidou and Duit (Journal of research on science teaching 30:85-106) conducted interviews with 34 German students in Grade 10, who had previously received four years of physics instruction. The students were asked questions based on a scenario having to do with the cooling of a hot piece of metal. The authors express concern at one point, that:, "Some students appeared to be unaware that every cooling process requires an interaction partner. It appears that they held the idea that bodies may cool spontaneously without other (colder) bodies being involved." (Ibid. p. 97)

In reading the background of the German students, it's no wonder that they thought bodies could cool spontaneously they learned about heat radiation in the 7th grade. As I'm sure you all know, hot objects can become cooler by emitting infra-red radiation, and do not need to interact with other objects to do so. This error is repeated in the AAAS Benchmarks, which state:

> Middle- and high-school students do not always explain heat-exchange phenomena as interactions. For example, students often think objects cool down or release heat spontaneously - that is, without being in contact with a cooler object. (AAAS Benchmarks p. 337)

The paper by Kesidou and Duit has been favorably cited in a recent letter (see appendix) from Bruce Alberts, President of the National Academy of Sciences. Dr. Alberts is an outstanding scientist, but he may be unaware that this paper contains an egregious error. I am compelled to ask why, for all the millions of dollars that have been spent, our students are being so poorly served by these national standards documents? I wish I could say that this was the only example of a paper in which the authors make a mistake about the science. Unfortunately it is a common finding.

Childrens perceptions of the shape of the Earth

My final example of citations in the AAAS Benchmarks is representative of a school of thought called post-modernism, in which what is generally called scientific fact is taken to be merely a "belief system". In the first printing in 1992 of a National Research Council document discussing the intellectual foundations of the National Science Standards, it was stated that the standards would reflect the "postmodernist view of science" that "questions the objectivity of observations and the truth of scientific knowledge." The National Science Education Standards themselves, state a vision that there should be less emphasis on "knowing scientific facts and information", less emphasis on "activities that demonstrate and verify science content", and less emphasis on "getting an answer" (NSES p. 113).

In the cited paper, Vosniadou and Brewer (Cognitive psychology 24:535-585) report the mental models children hold of shape of the Earth. These authors conducted interviews on 60 students between the ages of 6 and 11, and evaluated artwork they drew of the Earth situated in space. Their rubric for scoring these childrens' drawings was complicated. If for example a child drew the Earth as a circle surrounded by stars in space, that was taken to be a indication that the Earth was a sphere. If the stars appear on only one side of the Earth, it was assumed that the student believed the Earth is flat. What is even more appalling than the research methodology, is the language used by the authors:

> The purpose of the present study was to further investigate the nature of childrenís intuitive knowledge about the shape of the earth and to understand how this knowledge changes as children are exposed to the culturally accepted information that the earth is a sphere (Ibid. p. 541)

The authors repeat this peculiar phrase 'the culturally accepted information that the earth is a sphere', or something similar to it, a total of four times in the paper. It is not clear from these statements whether the authors are themselves willing to commit to the proposition that the Earth is not flat. I would merely ask: How is it possible that the AAAS, the National Academy of Sciences, and the National Science Foundation have spent so many hundreds of millions of dollars to increase the influence of this type of thought in our schools?

The vision of the national standards documents is that scientific facts have little value, and children should not learn them, and after all, cannot learn them. Depriving students of a content-rich education in science will not give them standing in the global economy.

A California Commission has recently taken a different course, in developing content-rich academic standards in science for the K-12 schools. A copy of these standards have been included with my written testimony. Although many documents were consulted during the writing of these standards, including the AAAS Benchmarks and National Science Education Standards, one of the primary considerations was the content knowledge expectations placed on students in other countries.

I have included in my written testimony, the 1997 Indian Certificate of Secondary Education Examination. There are several reasons for assessing our own expectations of student achievement against those of India. Their syllabus distinguishes the content knowledge that all secondary students are to learn, which is indicated in italics, from the more advanced content knowledge expected of college-bound science majors. Since much of the thrust of our own national science standards documents is to define literacy for all students, this is an important distinction.

It is clear from this syllabus that India expects significant content knowledge from all of its students. In the 9th year of schooling (Class IX) for example, all students learn about friction and lubrication, pressure in a liquid at rest, and the effect of pressure on the boiling point of a liquid (appendix p. 64). They learn about the expansion of solids, liquids and gases, and paths of heat conduction, convection and radiation (appendix p. 65). The A-level students learn much more still (see non-italicized text).

Despite the problems of grinding poverty and multiple languages, India is training students to such a high level that they are rapidly becoming a world leader in the fields of information technology. We have also seen evidence in the past few months that their nuclear physicists learned a few things in school. As the late Albert Shanker, President of the American Federation of Teachers remarked (in Making Standards Count: The case for student incentives. American Federation of Teachers, 1994): "...when you talk about world class standards, there is a world out there."

So what are the systemic initiatives doing to help prepare our students for the global economy? I've copied three exercises from a 9th grade textbook (Issues, Evidence and You, LAB-AIDS, Inc.) being promulgated in the LA schools by the LA Urban Systemic Initiative, and have included them with my written testimony. The first activity in the book has students sipping samples of water from cups, with the challenge to attempt to reach a group consensus on which sample in the taste test might have come from bottled water. An example taken from the middle of the book has students mixing hot and cold water, and predicting the outcome (if you guessed warm water, then you must have studied in advance!). The last activity in the book has students read a short passage about the history of Easter Island, and answer questions such as "What does this parable tell us about our own relationship to our environment?" Though these might be good exercises in the third or fourth grade, the content-knowledge expectations are shockingly low for a student in high school.

The educational reform movement in this country has caused us to lose our grounding and focus on what is good practice in science education. In September of last year, the House Committee on Science heard testimony from the President of the Technical Education Research Center on inquiry-based learning for the 21st century. Among the exemplary curricula presented by this individual was an example called "The Pringle's Challenge", in which students create a mailing container that is both lightweight and strong, and "use that container to mail one Pringle's potato chip to a partner school without breaking the chip. When the package arrives, the receiving school determines whether the chip is intact, measures the weight and volume of the package, and gives the package an overall score based on these three variables." Our poor showing in the 12th grade TIMSS study should come as no surprise. While our students were mailing potato chips to each other, students in other countries were hitting the science books and learning something.

The American Educator, Spring/Summer 1998

What Reading Does for the Soul
A Girl and Her Books
By Annie Dillard

I BEGAN reading books, reading books to delirium. I began by vanishing from the known world into the passive abyss of reading but soon found myself engaged with surprising vigor because the things in the books, or even the things surrounding the books, roused me from my stupor. From the nearest library I learned every sort of surprising thing—some of it, though not much of it, from the books themselves.

The Homewood branch of Pittsburgh's Carnegie Library system was in a Negro section of town—Homewood. This branch was our nearest library; Mother drove me to it every two weeks for many years, until I could drive myself. I only very rarely saw other white people there.

I understood that our maid, Margaret Butler, had friends in Homewood. I never saw her there, but I did see Henry Watson.

I was getting out of Mother's car in front of the library when Henry appeared on the sidewalk; he was walking with some other old men. I had never before seen him at large; it must have been his day off. He had gold-rimmed glasses, a gold front tooth, and a frank, open expression. It would embarrass him, I thought, if I said hello to him in front of his friends. I was wrong. He spied me, picked me up—books and all—swung me as he always did, and introduced Mother and me to his friends. Later, as we were climbing the long stone steps to the library's door, Mother said, "That's what I mean by good manners."

The Homewood Library had graven across its enormous stone facade: FREE TO THE PEOPLE. In the evenings, neighborhood people—the men and women of Homewood—browsed in the library and brought their children. By day, the two vaulted rooms, the adults' and children's sections, were almost empty. The kind Homewood librarians, after a trial period, had given me a card to the adult section. This was an enormous silent room with marble floors. Nonfiction was on the left.

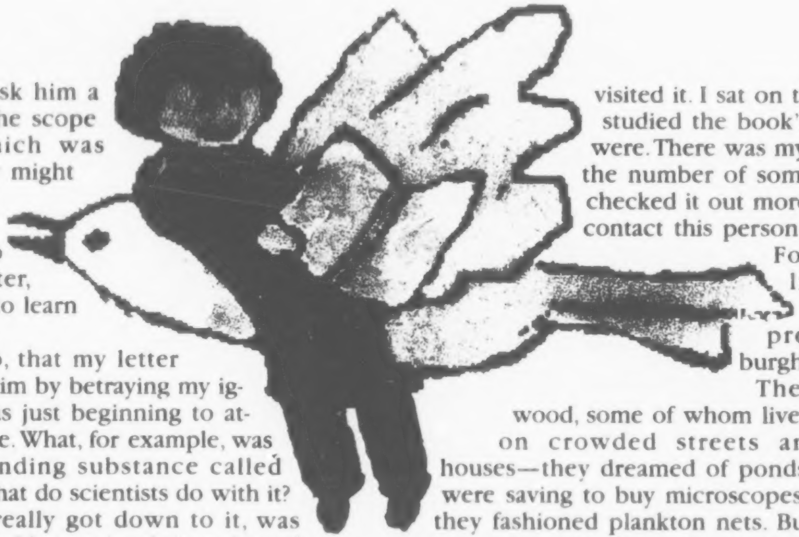
Beside the farthest wall, and under leaded windows set ten feet from the floor, so that no human being could ever see anything from them—next to the wall, and at the farthest remove from the idle librarians at their curved wooden counter, and from the oak bench where my mother waited in her camel's-hair coat chatting with the librarians or reading—stood the last and darkest and most obscure of the tall nonfiction stacks: NEGRO HISTORY and NATURAL HISTORY. It was in Natural History, in the cool darkness of a bottom shelf, that I found *The Field Book of Ponds and Streams*.

The Field Book of Ponds and Streams was a small, blue-bound book printed in fine type on thin paper, like *The Book of Common Prayer.* Its third chapter explained how to make sweep nets, plankton nets, glass-bottomed buckets, and killing jars. It specified how to mount slides, how to label insects on their pins, and how to set up a freshwater aquarium.

One was to go into "the field" wearing hip boots and perhaps a head net for mosquitoes. One carried in a "ruck-sack" half a dozen corked test tubes, a smattering of screwtop baby-food jars, a white enamel tray, assorted pipettes and eyedroppers, an artillery of cheesecloth nets, a notebook, a hand lens, perhaps a map, and *The Field Book of Ponds and Streams.* This field—unlike the fields I had seen, such as the field where Walter Milligan played football—was evidently very well watered, for there one could find, and distinguish among, daphniae, planaria, water pennies, stonefly larvae, dragonfly nymphs, salamander larvae, tadpoles, snakes, and turtles, all of which one could carry home.

That anyone had lived the fine life described in Chapter 3 astonished me. Although the title page indicated quite plainly that one Ann Haven Morgan had written *The Field Book of Ponds and Streams,* I nevertheless imagined, perhaps from the authority and freedom of it, that its author was a man. It would be good to write him and assure him that someone had found his book, in the dark near the marble floor at the Homewood Library. I would, in the same letter or in a

Annie Dillard is the author of numerous books, including the Pulitzer Prize-winning Pilgrim at Tinker Creek. *This essay is excerpted from* An American Childhood, *her memoir of growing up in Pittsburgh in the 1950s. Copyright © 1987 by Annie Dillard. Reprinted by permission of Harper Collins Publishers, Inc.* An American Childhood *is available in paperback by Harper Perennial Library.*



subsequent one, ask him a question outside the scope of his book, which was where I personally might find a pond, or a stream. But I did not know how to address such a letter, of course, or how to learn if he was still alive.

I was afraid, too, that my letter would disappoint him by betraying my ignorance, which was just beginning to attract my own notice. What, for example, was this noisome-sounding substance called cheesecloth, and what do scientists do with it? What, when you really got down to it, was enamel? If candy could, notoriously, "eat through enamel," why would anyone make trays out of it? Where—short of robbing a museum—might a fifth-grade student at the Ellis School on Fifth Avenue obtain such a legendary item as a wooden bucket?

The Field Book of Ponds and Streams was a shocker from beginning to end. The greatest shock came at the end.

When you checked out a book from the Homewood Library, the librarian wrote your number on the book's card and stamped the due date on a sheet glued to the book's last page. When I checked out *The Field Book of Ponds and Streams* for the second time, I noticed the book's card. It was almost full. There were numbers on both sides. My hearty author and I were not alone in the world, after all. With us, and sharing our enthusiasm for dragonfly larvae and single-celled plants, were, apparently, many Negro adults.

Who were these people? Had they, in Pittsburgh's Homewood section, found ponds? Had they found streams? At home, I read the book again; I studied the drawings; I reread Chapter 3; then I settled in to study the due-date slip. People read this book in every season. Seven or eight people were reading this book every year, even during the war.

Every year, I read again *The Field Book of Ponds and Streams.* Often, when I was in the library, I simply visited it. I sat on the marble floor and studied the book's card. There we all were. There was my number. There was the number of someone else who had checked it out more than once. Might I contact this person and cheer him up? For I assumed that, like me, he had found pickings pretty slim in Pittsburgh.

The people of Homewood, some of whom lived in visible poverty, on crowded streets among burned-out houses—they dreamed of ponds and streams. They were saving to buy microscopes. In their bedrooms they fashioned plankton nets. But their hopes were even more vain than mine, for I was a child, and anything might happen; they were adults, living in Homewood. There was neither pond nor stream on the streetcar routes. The Homewood residents whom I knew had little money and little free time. The marble floor was beginning to chill me. It was not fair.

I had been driven into nonfiction against my wishes. I wanted to read fiction, but I had learned to be cautious about it.

"When you open a book," the sentimental library posters said, "anything can happen." This was so. A book of fiction was a bomb. It was a land mine you wanted to go off. You wanted it to blow your whole day. Unfortunately, hundreds of thousands of books were duds. They had been rusting out of everyone's way for so long that they no longer worked. There was no way to distinguish the duds from the live mines except to throw yourself at them headlong, one by one.

The suggestions of adults were uncertain and incoherent. They gave you Nancy Drew with one hand and *Little Women* with the other. They mixed good and bad books together because they could not distinguish between them. Any book that contained children, or short adults, or animals, was felt to be a children's book. So also was any book about the sea—as though danger or even fresh air were a child's prerogative—or any book by Charles Dickens or Mark Twain. Virtually all British books, actually, were children's books; no one understood children like the British. Suited to female children were love stories set in any century but this one. Consequently one had read, exasperated often to fury, *Pickwick Papers, Désirée, Wuthering Heights, Lad, a Dog, Gulliver's Travels, Gone With the Wind, Robinson Crusoe, Nordhoff* and *Hall's Bounty* trilogy, *Moby-Dick, The Five Little Peppers, Innocents Abroad, Lord Jim, Old Yeller.*

The fiction stacks at the Homewood Library, their volumes alphabetized by author, baffled me. How could I learn to choose a novel? That I could not easily reach the top two shelves helped limit my choices a little. Still, on the lower shelves I saw too many books: Mary Johnson, *Sweet Rocket;* Samuel Johnson, *Rasselas;* James Jones, *From Here to Eternity.* I checked out the last because I had heard of it; it was good. I decided to check out books I had heard of. I had heard of *The Mill on the Floss.* I read it, and it was good. On its binding was printed a figure, a man dancing or running; I had noticed this figure before. Like so many children before and after me, I learned to seek out this logo, the Modern Library colophon.

The going was always rocky. I couldn't count on Modern Library the way I could count on, say, *Mad* magazine, which never failed to slay me. *Native Son* was good, *Walden* was pretty good, *The Interpretation of Dreams* was okay, and *The Education of Henry Adams* was awful. *Ulysses,* a very famous book, was also awful. *Confessions* by Augustine, whose title promised so much, was a bust. *Confessions* by Jean-Jacques Rousseau was much better, though it fell apart halfway through.

In fact, it was a plain truth that most books fell apart halfway through. They fell apart as their protagonists quit, without any apparent reluctance, like idiots diving voluntarily into buckets, the most interesting part of their lives, and entered upon decades of unrelieved tedium. I was forewarned, and would not so bobble my adult life; when things got dull, I would go to sea.

Jude the Obscure was the type case. It started out so well. Halfway through, its author forgot how to write. After Jude got married, his life was over, but the book went on for hundreds of pages while he stewed in his own juices. The same thing happened in *The Little Shepherd of Kingdom Come,* which Mother brought me from a fair. It was simply a hazard of reading. Only a heartsick loyalty to the protagonists of the early chapters, to the eager children they had been, kept me reading chronological narratives to their bitter ends. Perhaps later, when I had become an architect, I would enjoy the latter halves of books more.

This was the most private and obscure part of life, this Homewood Library: a vaulted marble edifice in a mostly decent Negro neighborhood, the silent stacks of which I plundered in deep concentration for many years. There seemed then, happily, to be an infinitude of books.

I no more expected anyone else on earth to have read a book I had read than I expected someone else to have twirled the same blade of grass. I would never meet those Homewood people who were borrowing *The Field Book of Ponds and Streams;* the people who read my favorite books were invisible or in hiding, underground. Father occasionally raised his big eyebrows at the title of some volume I was hurrying off with, quite as if he knew what it contained—but I thought he must know of it by hearsay, for none of it seemed to make much difference to him. Books swept me away, one after the other, this way and that; I made endless vows according to their lights, for I believed them.

* * *

AFTER I read *The Field Book of Ponds and Streams* several times, I longed for a microscope. Everybody needed a microscope. Detectives used microscopes, both for the FBI and at Scotland Yard. Although usually I had to save my tiny allowance for things I wanted, that year for Christmas my parents gave me a microscope kit.

In a dark basement corner, on a white enamel table, I set up the microscope kit. I supplied a chair, a lamp, a batch of jars, a candle, and a pile of library books. The microscope kit supplied a blunt black three-speed microscope, a booklet, a scalpel, a dropper, an ingenious device for cutting thin segments of fragile tissue, a pile of clean slides and cover slips, and a dandy array of corked test tubes.

One of the test tubes contained "hay infusion." Hay infusion was a wee brown chip of grass blade. You added water to it, and after a week it became a jungle in a drop, full of one-celled animals. This did not work for me. All I saw in the microscope after a week was a wet chip of dried grass, much enlarged.

Another test tube contained "diatomaceous earth." This was, I believed, an actual pinch of the white cliffs of Dover. On my palm it was an airy, friable chalk. The booklet said it was composed of the silicaceous bodies of diatoms—one-celled creatures that lived in, as it were, small glass jewelry boxes with fitted lids. Diatoms, I read, come in a variety of transparent geometrical shapes. Broken and dead and dug out of geological deposits, they made chalk, and a fine abrasive used in silver polish and toothpaste. What I saw in the microscope must have been the fine abrasive—grit enlarged. It was years before I saw a recognizable, whole diatom. The kit's diatomaceous earth was a bust.

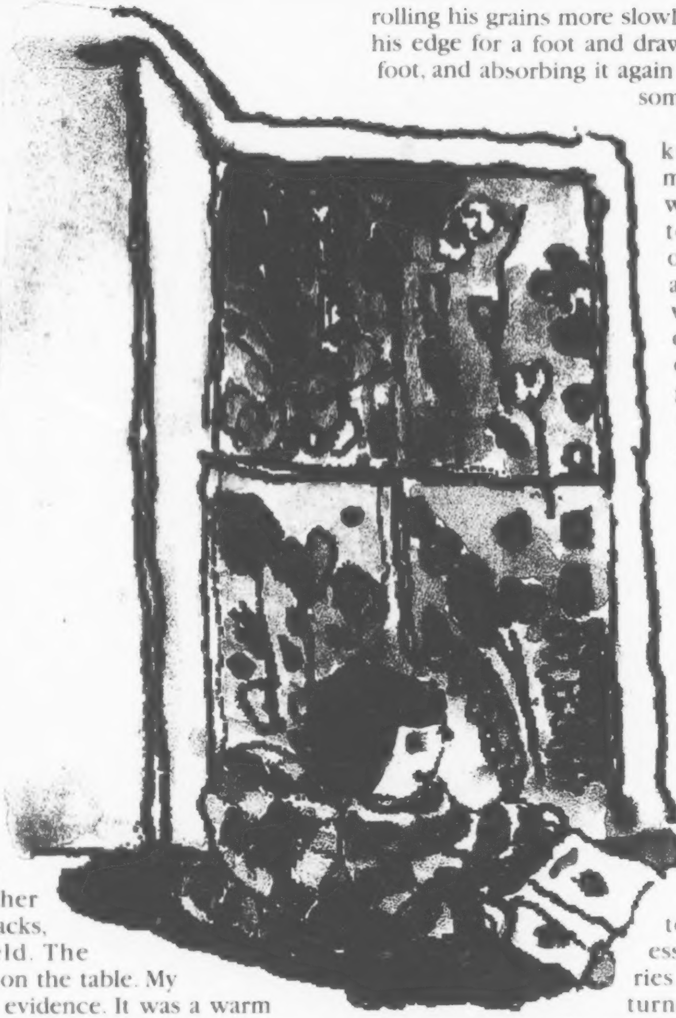
All that winter I played with the microscope. I prepared slides from things at hand, as the books suggested. I looked at the transparent membrane inside an onion's skin and saw the cells. I looked at a section of cork and saw the cells, and at scrapings from the inside of my cheek, ditto. I looked at my blood and saw not much; I looked at my urine and saw long iridescent crystals, for the drop had dried.

All this was very well, but I wanted to see the wildlife I had read about. I wanted especially to see the famous amoeba, who had eluded me. He was supposed to live in the hay infusion, but I hadn't found him there. He lived outside in warm ponds and streams, too, but I lived in Pittsburgh, and it had been a cold winter.

Finally late that spring I saw an amoeba. The week before, I had gathered puddle water from Frick Park; it had been festering in a jar in the basement. This June night after dinner I figured I had waited long enough. In the basement at my microscope table I spread a scummy drop of Frick Park puddle water on a slide, peeked in, and lo, there was the famous amoeba. He was as blobby and grainy as his picture; I would have known him anywhere.

Before I had watched him at all, I ran upstairs. My parents were still at the table, drinking coffee. They, too, could see the famous amoeba. I told them, bursting, that he was all set up, that they should hurry before his water dried. It was the chance of a lifetime.

Father had stretched out his long legs and was tilting back in his chair. Mother sat with her knees crossed, in blue slacks, smoking a Chesterfield. The dessert dishes were still on the table. My sisters were nowhere in evidence. It was a warm evening; the big dining-room windows gave onto blooming rhododendrons.



Mother regarded me warmly. She gave me to understand that she was glad I had found what I had been looking for, but that she and Father were happy to sit with their coffee, and would not be coming down.

She did not say, but I understood at once, that they had their pursuits (coffee?) and I had mine. She did not say, but I began to understand then, that you do what you do out of your private passion for the thing itself.

I had essentially been handed my own life. In subsequent years my parents would praise my drawings and poems, and supply me with books, art supplies, and sports equipment, and listen to my troubles and enthusiasms, and supervise my hours, and discuss and inform, but they would not get involved with my detective work, nor hear about my reading, nor inquire about my homework or term papers or exams, nor visit the salamanders I caught, nor listen to me play the piano, nor attend my field hockey games, nor fuss over my insect collection with me, or my poetry collection or stamp collection or rock collection. My days and nights were my own to plan and fill.

When I left the dining room that evening and started down the dark basement stairs, I had a life. I sat next to my wonderful amoeba, and there he was, rolling his grains more slowly now, extending an arc of his edge for a foot and drawing himself along by that foot, and absorbing it again and rolling on. I gave him some more pond water.

I had hit pay dirt. For all I knew, there were paramecia, too, in that pond water, or daphniae, or stentors, or any of the many other creatures I had read about and never seen: volvox, the spherical algal colony; euglena with its one red eye; the elusive, glassy diatom; hydra, rotifers, water bears, worms. Anything was possible. The sky was the limit.

* * *

SINCE WE had moved, my reading had taken a new turn.

Books wandered in and out of my hands, as they had always done, but now most of them had a common theme. This new theme was the source of imagination at its most private—never mentioned, rarely even brought to consciousness. It was, essentially, a time, and a series of places, to which I returned nightly. So also must thousands, or millions, of us who grew up in the 1950s, reading what came to hand. What came to hand in those years were books about the past war: the war in England, France, Belgium, Norway, Italy, Greece; the war in Africa; the war in the Pacific, in Guam, New Guinea, the Philippines; the war, Adolf Hitler, and the camps.

We read Leon Uris's popular novels, *Exodus*, and, better, *Mila 18*, about the Warsaw ghetto. We read Hersey's *The Wall*—again, the Warsaw ghetto. We read *Time* magazine, and *Life*, and *Look*. It was in the air, that there had been these things. We read, above all, and over and over, for we were young, Anne Frank's *The Diary of a Young Girl*. This was where we belonged; here we were at home.

I say, "we," but in fact I did not know anyone else who read these things. Perhaps my parents did, for they brought the books home. What were my friends reading? We did not then talk about books; our reading was private, and constant, like the interior life itself. Still, I say, there must have been millions of us. The theaters of war—the lands, the multiple seas, the very corridors of air—and the death camps in Europe, with their lines of starved bald people...these, combined, were the settings in which our imaginations were first deeply stirred.

Earlier generations of children, European children, I inferred, had had on their minds heraldry and costumed adventure. They read *The Count of Monte Cristo* and *The Three Musketeers*. They read about King Arthur and Lancelot and Galahad; they read about Robin Hood. I had read some of these things and considered them behind me. It would have been pleasant, I suppose, to close your eyes and imagine yourself in a suit of armor, astride an armored horse, fighting a battle for honor with broadswords on a pennanted plain, or in a copse of trees.

But of what value was honor when, in book after book, the highest prize was a piece of bread? Of what use was a broadsword, or even a longbow, against Hitler's armies that occupied Europe, against Hitler's Luftwaffe, Hitler's Panzers, Hitler's U-boats, or against Hitler's S.S., who banged on the door and led Anne Frank and her family away? We closed our eyes and imagined how we would survive the death camps—maybe with honor and maybe not. We imagined how we would escape the death camps, imagined how we would liberate the death camps. How? We fancied and schemed, but we had read too much, and knew there was no possible way. This was a novel concept: Can't do. We were in for the duration. We closed our eyes and waited for the Allies, but the Allies were detained.

Now and over the next few years, the books appeared and we read them. We read *The Bridge Over the River Kwai*, *The Young Lions*. In the background sang a chorus of smarmy librarians:

> The world of books is a child's
> Land of enchantment.
> When you open a book and start reading
> You enter another world—the world
> Of make-believe—where anything can happen.

We read *Thirty Seconds Over Tokyo*, and *To Hell and Back*. We read *The Naked and the Dead*, *Run Silent, Run Deep*, and *Tales of the South Pacific* in which American sailors saw native victims of elephantiasis pushing their own enlarged testicles before them in wheelbarrows. We read *The Caine Mutiny*, *Some Came Running*.

I was a skilled bombardier. I could run a submarine with one hand and evade torpedoes, depth charges, and mines. I could disembowel a soldier with a bayonet, survive under a tarp in a lifeboat, and parachute behind enemy lines. I could contact the Resistance with my high-school French and eavesdrop on the Germans with my high-school German:

"Du! Kleines Mädchen! Bist du französisches Madchen oder bist du Amerikanischer spy?"

"Je suis une jeune fille de la belle France, Herr S.S. Officer."

"Prove it!"

"Je suis, tu es, il est, nous sommes, vous étes, ils sont."

"Very gut. Run along and play."

What were librarians reading these days? One librarian pressed on me a copy of *Look Homeward, Angel*. "How I envy you," she said, "having a chance to read this for the very first time." But it was too late, several years too late.

At last Hitler fell, and scientists working during the war came up with the atomic bomb. We read *On the Beach*, *A Canticle for Leibowitz*; we read *Hiroshima*. Reading about the bomb was a part of reading about the war: these were actual things and events, large in their effects on millions of people, vivid in their nearness to each man's or woman's death. It was a relief to turn from life to something important.

At school we had air-raid drills. We took the drills seriously; surely Pittsburgh, which had the nation's steel, coke, and aluminum, would be the enemy's first target.

I knew that during the war, our father, who was 4-F because of a collapsing lung, had "watched the skies." We all knew that people still watched the skies. But when the keen-eyed watcher spotted the enemy bomber over Pittsburgh, what, precisely, would be his moves? Surely he could only calculate, just as we in school did, what good it would do him to get under something.

When the air-raid siren sounded, our teachers stopped talking and led us to the school basement. There the gym teachers lined us up against the cement walls and steel lockers, and showed us how to lean in and fold our arms over our heads. Our small school ran from kindergarten through twelfth grade. We had air-raid drills in small batches, four or five grades together, because there was no room for us all against the walls. The teachers had to stand in the middle of the basement rooms: those bright Pittsburgh women who taught Latin, science, and art, and those educated, beautifully mannered European women who taught French, history, and German, who had landed in Pittsburgh at the end of their respective flights from Hitler, and who had baffled us by their common insistence on tidiness, above all, in our written work.

The teachers stood in the middle of the room, not talking to each other. We tucked against the walls and lockers: dozens of clean girls wearing green jumpers, green knee socks, and pink-soled white bucks. We folded our skinny arms over our heads, and raised to the enemy a clatter of gold scarab bracelets and gold bangle bracelets.

If the bomb actually came, should we not let the little kids—the kindergartners like Molly, and the first and second graders—go against the wall? We older ones would stand in the middle with the teachers. The European teachers were almost used to this sort of thing. We would help them keep spirits up; we would sing "Frère Jacques," or play Buzz.

Our house was stone. In the basement was a room furnished with a long wooden bar, tables and chairs, a leather couch, a refrigerator, a sink, an ice maker, a fireplace, a piano, a record player, and a set of drums. After the bomb, we would live, in the manner of Anne Frank and her family, in this basement. It had also a larger set of underground rooms, which held a washer and dryer, a workbench, and especially, food: shelves of canned fruits and vegetables, and a chest freezer. Our family could live in the basement for many years, until the radiation outside blew away. Amy and Molly would grow up there. I would teach them all I knew, and entertain them on the piano. Father would build a radiation barrier for the basement's sunken windows. He would teach me to play the drums. Mother would feed us and tend to us. We would grow close.

I had spent the equivalent of years of my life, I thought, in concentration camps, in ghettoes, in prison camps, and in lifeboats. I knew how to ration food and water. We would each have four ounces of food a day and eight ounces of water, or maybe only four ounces of water. I knew how to stretch my rations by hoarding food in my shirt, by chewing slowly, by sloshing water around in my mouth and wetting my tongue well before I swallowed. If the water gave out in the taps, we could drink club soda or tonic. We could live on the juice in canned food. I figured the five of us could live many years on the food in the basement—but I was not sure.

One day I asked Mother: How long could we last on the food in the basement? She did not know what I had been reading. How could she have known?

"The food in the basement? In the freezer and on the shelves? Oh, about a week and a half. Two weeks."

She knew, as I knew, that there were legs of lamb in the freezer, turkeys, chickens, pork roasts, shrimp, and steaks. There were pounds of frozen vegetables, quarts of ice cream, dozens of Popsicles. By her reckoning, that wasn't many family dinners: a leg of lamb one night, rice, and vegetables; steak the next night, potatoes, and vegetables.

"Two weeks! We could live much longer than two weeks!"

"There's really not very much food down there. About two weeks' worth."

I let it go. What did I know about feeding a family? On the other hand, I considered that if it came down to it, I would have to take charge.

It was clear that adults, including our parents, approved of children who read books, but it was not at all clear why this was so. Our reading was subversive, and we knew it. Did they think we read to improve our vocabularies? Did they want us to read and not pay the least bit of heed to what we read, as they wanted us to go to Sunday school and ignore what we heard?

I was now believing books more than I believed what I saw and heard. I was reading books about the actual, historical, moral world—in which somehow I felt I was not living.

The French and Indian War had been, for me, a purely literary event. Skilled men in books could survive it. Those who died, an arrow through the heart, thrilled me by their last words. This recent war's survivors, some still shaking, some still in mourning, taught in our classrooms. *"Wir waren ausgebommt,"* one dear old white-haired Polish lady related in German class, her family was "bombed out," and we laughed, we smart girls, because this was our slang for "drunk." Those who died in this war's books died whether they were skilled or not. Bombs fell on their cities or ships, or they starved in the camps or were gassed or shot, or they stepped on land mines and died surprised, trying to push their intestines back in their abdomens with their fingers and thumbs.

What I sought in books was imagination. It was depth, depth of thought and feeling; some sort of extreme of subject matter; some nearness to death; some call to courage. I myself was getting wild; I wanted wildness, originality, genius, rapture, hope. I wanted strength, not tea parties. What I sought in books was a world whose surfaces, whose people and events and days lived, actually matched the exaltation of the interior life. There you could live.

Those of us who read carried around with us like martyrs a secret knowledge, a secret joy, and a secret hope: There is a life worth living where history is still taking place; there are ideas worth dying for, and circumstances where courage is still prized. This life could be found and joined, like the Resistance. I kept this exhilarating faith alive in myself, concealed under my uniform shirt like an oblate's ribbon; I would not be parted from it.

We who had grown up in the Warsaw ghetto, who had seen all our families gassed in the death chambers, who had shipped before the mast, and hunted sperm whale in Antarctic seas; we who had marched from Moscow to Poland and lost our legs to the cold; we who knew by heart every snag and sandbar on the Mississippi River south of Cairo, and knew by heart Morse code, forty parables and psalms, and lots of Shakespeare; we who had battled Hitler and Hirohito in the North Atlantic, in North Africa, in New Guinea and Burma and Guam, in the air over London, in the Greek and Italian hills; we who had learned to man minesweepers before we learned to walk in high heels—were we going to marry Holden Caulfield's roommate, and buy a house in Point Breeze, and send our children to dancing school?

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Selected Readings on School Reform

Grab Bag

We wrap up this issue of *Selected Readings on School Reform* with a collection of items that didn't quite fit into our categories but are nonetheless important. First up, Diane Ravitch's article from *The New Democrat,* "Is Head Start Smart?" takes a close look at America's best-known social program. Over the years, Ravitch argues, Head Start has become increasingly a day care program rather than a source of cognitive development. Great intellectual and human potential is lost by this trend, which needs reversing.

Washington Post reporters Doug Struck and Valerie Strauss examine a growing challenge to the District of Columbia's beleaguered school system in their article, "Special Ed Law is Big Business." The District, suffering from a backlog of special education cases, is being forced to pay out big bucks to attorneys who justify their fat fees by claiming that they are working to benefit an under-served population. (And people say that no one makes a profit in today's public education system!)

Next we present an original submission from Richard K. Munro entitled "Bilingual Miseducation." Munro, a veteran bilingual education teacher from California, discusses his adamant support for Proposition 227, the "English for the Children" amendment. Unlike many of his colleagues, Munro was willing to challenge the bilingual education establishment. His rare perspective provides some keen insights.

In the world of higher education, some important changes are underway. According to Peter Schmidt's article, "State's Increasingly Link Budgets to Performance," from *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, a number of states are pushing for greater academic accountability from their public institutions. By linking budgets to performance, lawmakers hope that colleges will prove more adept at serving the public interest. As evidenced by a couple of "non-parodies" with which we conclude, U.S. higher ed still has a long way to go.

SMF

The New Democrat, **July/August 1998**

IS HEAD START SMART?

Restoring the Original Promise of America's Favorite Social Program

BY DIANE RAVITCH

It is hard to think of a federal program that is admired as much as Head Start. It is also hard to think of one that has fallen so short of its ambitions.

When the program was launched in 1965 as the keystone of the War on Poverty, it promised to give young children from poor homes a "head start" on their schooling. But over the years, study after study has produced no convincing evidence that it actually does so. The problem isn't that we can't prepare poor children to succeed in school; it's that we've stopped trying. Head Start can't fulfill its promise in its present form. And unless Congress and the executive branch raise Head Start's aspirations, it never will.

From the beginning, Head Start was designed to be comprehensive: It included educational, social, and psychological services; nutrition and health care; programs for families; and a career ladder for paraprofessionals. It began as a summer program for 500,000 children and was expanded to reach 700,000 children in both summer and year-round settings by the late 1960s.

Unfortunately, Head Start's proponents oversold it, promising that it would quickly lift the IQ scores of poor children and break the cycle of poverty. These inflated expectations were dashed in 1969, when a national evaluation by the Westinghouse Learning Corporation and Ohio University found that the program produced no lasting cognitive or behavioral gains. (There have been hundreds of studies of Head Start since, but no comparable evaluations using a nationally representative sample.) Ardent supporters mobilized to save the program, but future growth and funding were reined in. By 1977 enrollment had dropped to about 325,000, with nearly all children in year-round programs.

Although its luster was dimmed, Head Start remained immensely popular. It's not hard to see why: In addition to whatever educational benefits it confers, Head Start also provides a range of important and popular services — including employment for large numbers of poor parents as teachers and aides. President Bush expanded enrollment in the program from 450,000 in 1989 to 713,000 in 1993. President Clinton further expanded it to 840,000 — about one-third of eligible children — and now wants to increase enrollment to 1 million by 2002.

Cognitive Loss

Head Start advocates responded to the early negative evaluations of the program's educational value by quietly abandoning cognitive development as its primary goal. Today, Head Start's chief purpose is not to prepare young children for school, but to provide them with nurturing day care, medical attention, and social services and to provide some of their parents with jobs. These are certainly important purposes, but by themselves they will not narrow the large education gap between poor and middle-class children.

Head Start's institutional place in the federal bureaucracy signifies its emphasis on social services rather than education. It began life in the Office of Economic Opportunity, was moved to the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, and is now ensconced in the Department of Health and Human Services. Its advocates consistently have opposed any suggestion of transferring the program to the Department of Education, fearing that such a move might narrow the program's scope.

Head Start has no standard curriculum for school readiness and cognitive development; in fact, it has no standard curriculum at all. Its "performance standards" are vague and lack substance. For example, each Head Start center is expected to support "emerging literacy and numeracy development through materials and activities according to the developmental level of each child." But in reality, an open-ended statement of this kind does not set any performance standard. Head Start centers receive no guidance about which skills and knowledge to teach or the best ways to teach them.

Indeed, Head Start prides itself on variability from one center to another. As the General Accounting Office has observed, "fundamental to program philosophy [is] the notion that communities be given considerable latitude to develop their own Head Start programs, an idea that has made variability a defining characteristic of the program." By design, parents must be involved in the development of each center's approach to education (imagine a hospital where patients were expected to decide which treatments were most appropriate). This rule, a remnant of the 1960s ideology of "maximum feasible participation," means that there is no uniform Head Start school-readiness curriculum, no instructional program of proven effectiveness. While local control of public schools is a firmly rooted American tradition, it is odd to see this concept enshrined in a federal program.

Head Start proponents deny that the program de-emphasizes cognitive development, but the low salaries and qualifications of the program's teachers suggest otherwise. As of the 1996-97 school year, the average Head Start teacher earned $17,802 annually. Senior teachers with 13 years of experience earned about $20,000 on average, or about $10,000 less than the *starting* salary of an inexperienced public school teacher in New York City. With pay that low, Head Start cannot compete for well-qualified teachers. It also suffers high turnover, as the best teachers soon leave for better paying jobs.

Educational qualifications for Head Start teachers are correspondingly low. Teachers must possess at least a child-development associate degree, which can be acquired through on-the-job training. Fewer than 30 percent have a bachelor's degree. As presently organized, Head Start virtually guarantees that the children with the greatest educational needs will have teachers with the lowest qualifications.

Health and social services and parent training certainly are important, but they should not eclipse the need to equip disadvantaged young children with the same school-readiness and learning skills their middle-class peers gain at home and in their preschools. Children enrolled in Head Start deserve well-trained teachers who can prepare them for success in school.

The Preschool Difference

Because there is no Head Start educational curriculum, it is impossible to know what children in the program are learning. And because Head Start makes a point of extreme variability among centers, it is impossible to know whether there is any consistency in what children are taught. This bizarre situation must end.

Federal officials should clearly establish school-readiness as a major goal of Head Start. They should develop a curriculum and set standards for what teachers should know and be able to do and what students are expected to learn. The Head Start classroom should be a cognitively enriched environment where children are exposed regularly to literacy, numeracy, and problem-solving activities. The aim should be to elevate Head Start from day care to preschool, without sacrificing its valuable social and medical services.

There is growing evidence that high-quality preschool makes a big difference in the lives of disadvantaged children. Studies of the Perry Preschool Program in Ypsilanti, Mich., indicate that a well-planned program — of far higher quality than what is ordinarily offered by Head Start centers — can have large effects on children's achievement, subsequent grade promotions, placement in regular rather than special education classes, and high school graduation. French preschools — which are designed as schools, not day care centers — also have reported positive results. The French programs serve nearly all French children ages 3 to 5. Their teachers and directors are highly qualified and well-paid. The French curriculum is designed to reduce the cognitive gaps between poor and advantaged children; it provides active, carefully planned experiences with language and numbers, as well as arts, crafts, and games. Affluent American parents, eager to give their children a "head start," often send them to preschools with enriched curricula. The Core Knowledge Foundation in Charlottesville, Va., has recently released a set of guidelines for preschool that reflect the best American and French practices.

What's Really Needed

Federal policymakers face a choice about the future of Head Start: Expand it without fundamental change, as the Clinton administration now plans; or change it to emphasize cognitive development and school-readiness. The first option is easier because it requires only more money. But we cannot expect much from expanding a day care program of uneven quality to even more children.

It would be far preferable to redesign the educational component of Head Start while preserving its capacity to deliver nutritional, social, and medical services to children and their families. This would mean recruiting a well-qualified staff of teachers and paying them higher salaries and establishing a national curriculum intended to prepare young children to succeed in school. To be sure, it would cost more, but what we are doing now may be even more expensive down the road. At the very least, when Congress reauthorizes Head Start in the next year or so, it should set up a significant number of high-quality demonstration projects and insist upon careful evaluation of their effects.

In the short run, change will threaten those who see Head Start as a jobs program, a way station for adults leaving the welfare rolls. In the long run, however, a reconfigured Head Start could dramatically improve the lives of the nation's most vulnerable children ◆

Diane Ravitch is a New York-based senior fellow with the Progressive Policy Institute. Martha Wright, a former intern at the Progressive Policy Institute, assisted the author with research.

The Washington Post, July 20, 1998

Special Ed Law Is Big Business

Students' Attorneys Collectively Receiving Millions in Fees

By Doug Struck
and Valerie Strauss
Washington Post Staff Writers

For eight years, Travis A. Murrell was a D.C. special education hearing officer listening to cases for $150 to $400 each. In that time, he recalls being thanked only once.

So he quit, opened a law firm two years ago, and began bringing cases instead of hearing them. Today he has a sleek wood-and-glass suite of offices downtown with his firm's name in gold letters. In June and July, he and his partner—a former school attorney—expect to collect $1.7 million in fees from the school system.

And now a couple times a day, he said, some parents will thank him for getting their children help or out of the public schools entirely.

Representing special education students in the District once was an obscure niche for just a few firms. Now it's a booming, lucrative industry that includes at least 30 lawyers.

Payments to those lawyers for administrative cases alone totaled $5.7 million in 1997 and may reach as much as $8 million next year, according to school officials. Legal fees for cases taken to federal court are estimated at an additional $2 million.

At a time when the city's school system is crying for money to try to build an adequate special education system—and thereby begin to lessen the flood of legal challenges—these attorney fees rankle school officials who say the money should be spent on children.

"It's a major problem. Lawyers are actually going around soliciting clients," complained Donald Rickford, chief financial officer for the schools.

> "Attorney fees are higher because there are more willing to serve a population that was underserved in the past."
>
> — **Paul Dalton,** who has four lawyers handling special education cases in his firm

The 1976 federal law for disabled children said parents can make legal appeals and sue if the public school system does not give their children a timely and appropriate education. The beleaguered special education system rarely meets such standards—the backlogs alone violate federal deadlines. So the cases are an easy win, and a lawyer can often get a student placed in a private school at taxpayer expense.

"The system shouldn't be designed in a way to enable all these lawyers to make all this money," said Paul Chassy, a former federal special education official who is also a lawyer.

The influx of lawyers has been boosted by seminars and by a semester-long course at the University of the District of Columbia Law School that has trained lawyers in the intricacies of special education law. The course, in part, was intended to encourage lawyers to help poor children get services they deserve. The legal fees for a successful case are paid by the taxpayers.

"Attorney fees are higher because there are more willing to serve a population that was underserved in the past—primarily poor and black children in Southeast," said Paul Dalton, who has four lawyers handling such cases in his firm.

But having more lawyers in the field has resulted in an avalanche of cases for an already backlogged system. Murrell's firm filed 102 requests for formal hearings on one day alone.

"I couldn't get the schools to return my calls. It was like calling the black hole of Calcutta," he said. "I wanted to get their attention, and I did."

Murrell also has retained the services of several school employees whose knowledge of the D.C. system proved marketable in the private sector.

The cases have generated a blizzard of lawyers' bills—and overwhelmed city officials are paying them without first checking their fairness or accuracy, according to memos obtained by The Post.

The schools' legal office is supposed to review the bills but has been hit with personnel cutbacks. With lawyers threatening to file more suits for nonpayment, the system's financial division recently decided to pay the lawyers unless it receives a written response from the Office of General Counsel (within 15 days, according to an internal memo to the legal department) "stating that the bills are not accurate," according to an internal memo to the legal department.

Lawrence D. Crocker, head of the legal office, was unavailable for comment last week. A secretary there said questions about legal bills should be directed to the finance division [because] "we don't handle legal bills anymore."

The private lawyers, who say they often wait for months to get paid, bristle at the suggestion that they are in the business only for the fees.

"D.C. education is working with dwindling resources, and as a result, a lot of children are going unserved," Murrell said. "We're not out here mining the system to make oodles of bucks. What we are doing is getting special education and related services for people who otherwise would not get them. And for that, we do receive legal fees."

Bilingual Miseducation

RICHARD K. MUNRO

A great American wrote—and I agree with him—that after English, Spanish is the "most necessary of the modern languages" and "Spanish is highly interesting to us, as the language spoken by such a great a portion of the inhabitants of our continents." The author of these words was Thomas Jefferson, a notable amateur linguist and probably the only U.S. president to have read Don Quixote in the original. I am a bilingual teacher, dedicated to immigrant kids and the teaching of Spanish. Few could be stauncher supporters of universal free public education than I. But these firmly held beliefs did not stop me from actively supporting Proposition 227, the California "English for the Children" amendment, and signing Ron Unz's petitions in full view of a hostile audience of fellow bilingual teachers. What in the world could have convinced me to announce on Telemundo, to the chagrin of many, that bilingual education was a failure? How was it possible that many Hispanics—including many of my relatives, colleagues, present and former students—unwaveringly supported 227?

Could it be that bilingual education, as commonly practiced, is not a paragon of high academic achievement? Could it be that bilingual education is not a highly regarded exemplar of flexible innovation but instead is synonymous with mediocrity and bureaucratic intransigence? Parents and teachers ask if the policy of preserving—and expanding—bilingual education at any cost threatens the survival and success of American public schools.

First of all, despite an unbecoming campaign of disinformation, Prop 227 was not the draconian "English-only" law that Carlos Fuentes, the California Teachers Association and MALDEF said it was. Many bilingual activists denounced the law without (apparently) having studied its text or noted the bilingual nature of the 227 campaign—which included Spanish as well as English radio spots. The courts upheld 227, because bilingual education is no more a constitutional right than the right to do only group projects in your math, science, social studies or English class.

However, the passage of 227 was merely the first battle against a powerful combination of entrenched special interests, which include the ivory tower prophets of bilingual education theory and bureaucrats feeding off a multibillion-dollar bilingual/multicultural/affirmative action empire.

Spanish-only is not bilingual

Just what is bilingual education? Teacher Debbie Burke, a former bilingual teacher in the LAUSD, described bilingual education as a “nightmare of red tape, double-talk and ideological narrow-mindedness with a tenacious retention rate that had no relationship to the good of students.” Parent Dorcas Cortizo Kimball vigorously opposed her children being shunted into the maw of bilingual education. Despite knowing her children were not

Spanish speakers the school system tested them and prepared all the paperwork so that they could be inducted into the bilingual program. "I'm an American citizen and a college graduate and know how to look out for my children," Mrs. Kimball said, "But I couldn't help imagining what must happen to countless immigrant parents who are at the mercy of bean-counting bureaucrats."

These bilingual education satraps always say "home language" or "native-language," which never means English, by the way, but is usually Spanish and sometimes Chinese. Multicultural theory commits schools to the creation of curricula in more than 100 languages including Cape Verde, Creole or Micmac dialects which are, naturally, "absolutely equal and useful." Have money, will translate! With the supremacy of "native language instruction" you can guarantee jobs and fat, exclusive budgets for linguistic and ethnic minorities in a way that goes far beyond the wildest dreams of the strongest advocates of affirmative action.

Seminars on bilingual education feel like the frenzied dawn of a new religion. First the audience listens, spellbound by their Guru. Then there is thunderous applause for the abstract, mind-boggling bilingual theories. These theories consist of cleverly crafted but essentially meaningless, polysyllabic Teacher-Ed cant as intellectually dead as Manichaeism. The believers line up to touch their beloved anointed one from whom all blessings (and cash) flow.

Grass-roots revolt

Not surprisingly, support for bilingual education is very strong among those who have the most to gain by its continuance—despite its checkered history of high spending and low student achievement. Becoming a Bilingual Coordinator is the fast track to principalships and posh administrative jobs. Beloved to ethnic nationalists, ethnic bureaucrats, and ethnic separatists are the theories of the influential American linguistic school.

What is remarkable is how support of bilingual education seems to be eroding among most Hispanics. Once Hispanics realize that teaching in English does not preclude the possibility of authentic bilingualism—because they know Spanish will always be an important part of the curriculum—their support for measures like 227 will become even more substantial.

It's easy to understand why: the current system does not work. The alarm signal is not only that Latinos suffer the highest dropout rates but that more than two-thirds of the graduates of bilingual programs must attend remedial classes in college. According to the *Wall Street Journal*, graduates of bilingual programs earn one-third less than their English-speaking peers. The principal problem: the utopian methods and the poor quality of the great majority of the teachers "designated bilingual." The mediocrity of the Spanish of many bilingual teachers is an open secret. For that reason many Latino parents are rebelling against a system dominated by intransigent bureaucrats. Children, whatever their race or country of origin, and whatever the language of their actual parents, naturally acquire the language of adoptive parents or their adopted country if they are in the mainstream and not ghettoized. One learns a language best by constant practice and immersion in a native-speaking environment.

In stark contrast to 187, the demonstrators against 227 were few and far between. Many Hispanics echoed the sentiments of Elizabeth, a student of Arvin High School in California:

> I ...agree with Proposition 227. I was in all English-speaking classes since I was in elementary school and I have learned that it helped me out a lot...[without English Immersion] my English would not be as good as it is now... It helped me learn English very fast, all my main periods are in English and I have one in Spanish and I think that's enough...I have relatives who have been in

> bilingual education ten years and they still are not fluent in English or in Spanish. I think that's very sad. They don't even have a chance to go into college. They are doing very bad in school because they haven't learned the language. I think people in bilingual classes and English-speaking classes have the same capability for going into college but [bilingual education] is denying them that chance.

The people, in their wisdom, know English is the *sine qua non* for higher academic achievement and they will be deceived no longer about the reality of the goals, methods and results of "phoney" bilingualism.

Seeds of revolution

So what really made me the bilingual dissident who dared rub shoulders with the "English language advocates"? Maybe it was the day I took over an "English" class and saw that the students were reading in Spanish and the shelves were filled with Spanish books. I observed students writing most of their uncorrected "personal" journals in an ungrammatical Spanish that made no distinction between performing "*sexito*" (intercourse) and having "*sesito*" (brains). What was going on? " Literacy" I was told, "We're working on literacy. We have to teach their native language so that they can become effective learners and transition to English." Orwell would have known how to respond to that one! Many of these students had been in "bilingual" programs for long periods of time: six months, eighteen months, even six years or more. It makes one think of the role of social promotion in lowering school standards inexorably and perhaps, under today's system, irrevocably.

Maybe it was the day Cal Poly (San Luis Obispo) sent a multicultural maven who ranted and raved to our students (mostly in street Spanish) in the most crude and vulgar way imaginable. He peppered his remarks with thinly veiled separatist references culminating with violent metaphors about chains, guns and "*gabachos*" (honkies).

Maybe it was the day I visited a "model high school" in southern California which boasted it had lowered the Hispanic dropout rate with alternative Spanish-only programs and the abolishment of onerous "paper requirements" like English-language writing proficiency tests. The L.A Times cartoon of the Chihuahua, wearing a bilingual education button, reading "*yo quiero trabajar en Taco Bell*" hit home. It spoke the truth about the tragic results of sub-par segregated "bilingual" education.

Maybe it was the day I learned "Joaquin," a brilliant student in my Advanced Placement Spanish class, did not graduate. I heard he became a piece-worker. Sheltering Joaquin from cultural realities—such as the startling fact that we are not a fully bilingual society—almost certainly arrested his development.

Maybe it was the day Virgilio came to me for advice. Virgilio was a respectful, hardworking, God-fearing Mexican immigrant lad. He had not passed his writing proficiency test nor his economics requirement. He had been counseled to get his credits through the migrant program. In three to six weeks he could do a series of booklets in Spanish to complete his studies and earn his red cap and gown. Virgilio had studied US history with me using English-language texts and it was there, he said, that he learned to learn to read English. I asked Virgilio what he wanted to do? Did he want to work in the fields the rest of his life? No, Virgilio wanted to be a teacher. He was concerned that the ESL and migrant programs were not academically rigorous (an astute observation!). Forget about rushing to get your diploma now, Virgilio, I said. Sign up for a regular economics class at the Adult School. It's given in English and meets five days a week. If you need help come see me Friday afternoons. Virgilio learned more English in his economics class and his afternoon sessions with me than he had in years of bilingual education. One day, Virgilio will be a wonderful, caring teacher, full of compassion and confidence.

Stop the madness

The point is that to succeed you have to get *out* of bilingual classes as soon as possible—every student worth his salt knows this. No wonder the small numbers of "successful graduates" from bilingual programs are usually above average in achievement.

Ending "bilingual education" nationwide would be a major educational reform that could be surpassed only by abolition of social promotion. It would certainly stop a practice that is not helping children thrive academically. But it would do more than that. The true meaning of bilingual education is controlling the way the masses think and pushing them leftward to the politics of resentment, irredentism, race preferences, and racial separatism. This is what Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. has called the "disuniting of America." No one knows how high a price American society will pay for this madness, but I suspect we cannot afford it. Which is why I, a Spanish and bilingual history teacher, believe we must *end bilingual education now*. As Ron K. Unz said: "Only by ending our failed system of bilingual education can we foster the true growth of bilingualism, and the unity and prosperity of our multiethnic society." Even if we cannot end the reign of phoney "bilingual" education, we must pressure it for disclosure, for accountability and for genuine standards. We owe it to the kids—all the kids—and to America.

Richard K. Munro is a teacher of Spanish, English and History at Arvin High School in California. He graduated with honors from New York University and holds degrees from Seattle University and the University of Northern Iowa. He actively campaigned for Prop 227, translating and appearing on Spanish language TV debates, radio interviews, and public forums.

The Chronicle of Higher Education, July 24, 1998

States Increasingly Link Budgets to Performance

Study finds that lawmakers view such policies as key to insuring that colleges meet public needs

BY PETER SCHMIDT

NEARLY EVERY STATE may soon link some spending on public colleges to institutional performance, according to a new survey of state officials in charge of higher-education finance.

Half of the states now link some of their spending on public colleges to the campuses' performance, and all but a handful appear likely to do so within the next five years, the survey found.

The survey was conducted by the Public Higher Education Program at the Rockefeller Institute of Government, in Albany, N.Y. A report on its findings, due to be issued this week, says they "show that coordinating boards and state officials are increasingly accepting the concept that results should somehow count when allocating resources to public colleges and universities."

Driving the states' push to hold public colleges financially accountable for their performance is not so much a desire to protect their investment as it is "a sense that, without results, states are not likely to prosper" economically, says Joseph C. Burke, the higher-education program's director.

The report warns, however, that "it is still too soon to tell whether funding for results is a fad or a trend."

The study also notes that nearly all of the states that have adopted such practices apply them to only a small fraction of their higher-education budgets—generally less than 5 per cent—and focus on rewarding successes rather than penalizing failures.

'WHAT CAMPUSES SHOULD DO'

Nevertheless, the survey found growing support for such budgeting practices in most of the states that have tried them. And, the report says, the approach appears to be affecting how states develop their higher-education budgets, shifting the focus "from what states should do for their campuses toward what campuses should do for their states."

The Rockefeller Institute survey distinguishes between "performance budgeting" and "performance funding," which it describes as two very different methods of using achievement indicators to determine how much money to give an institution.

It defines "performance budgeting" as a fairly loose and subjective practice that simply takes into account various areas of performance in determining an institution's overall appropriation, and lets state officials retain discretion over how much to alter the campus's bottom line.

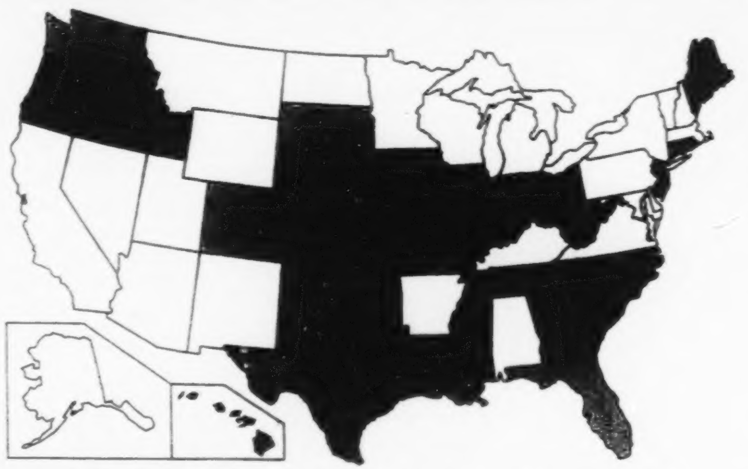
The survey found that 21 states use performance budgeting in determining public-college appropriations, up from 16 last year. As many as 31 states were expected to be using the practice within five years, and only one state that currently used performance budgeting, Georgia, had a program described as facing an uncertain fate (because of a forthcoming gubernatorial election).

"Performance funding" is more rigid, using a formula to determine how much to give a college that has met a prescribed goal. If an institution reaches a target—such as a 5-per-cent increase in its graduation rate—it gets a designated amount.

The recent survey found this practice in use in 13 states, including eight that also used performance budgeting. Last month, after the survey was completed, lawmakers in a 14th state, New Jersey, set aside $8.9-million to reward colleges that increase graduation rates, become more efficient, and make other improvements.

In addition, the trustees of New York's two university systems have moved on their own to use performance-based spending formulas in distributing a portion of campus budgets.

Performance-Based Financing in the States



■ These states use a formula to determine how much money to give public colleges for meeting certain prescribed goals.

■ These states take the performance of public colleges loosely into account in determining campus appropriations.

▨ These states use both approaches. They give colleges an appropriation based on overall performance, but set aside a pool of money to provide campuses with financial incentives to meet specific goals.

SOURCE: THE PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION PROGRAM OF THE ROCKEFELLER INSTITUTE OF GOVERNMENT AT THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

CHRONICLE MAP BY JASMINE STEWART

Although 20 states were described as likely to be using "performance funding" within five years, it remains the most controversial of the spending methods.

Arkansas tried and abandoned it before last year's survey by the Rockefeller Institute. Of the 10 states using it last year, two, Kentucky and Minnesota, subsequently dropped it. Colorado plans to phase out its program in favor of performance budgeting next year.

CONTROL FOR LEGISLATORS

"Performance funding presents an immediate and automatic threat to campus budgets, while the impact of performance budgeting is more remote and obscure," the report notes. It says legislators seem to prefer the latter method because it lets them retain more control over spending decisions.

The report says two developments have helped both spending methods gain more acceptance among colleges. Whereas state lawmakers had been mandating the programs and the indicators used, those decisions now tend to be left to higher-education coordinating boards, in consultation with the campuses themselves. And the newest programs generally involve small proportions of public-college budgets and seem "designed to make targeted changes rather than radical reforms."

The report predicts that most future programs will involve some combination of the two spending approaches examined by the survey. It notes that, of the six states that have adopted formula-driven methods since last year's survey, four—Illinois, Indiana, Oklahoma, and South Dakota—also have adopted performance budgeting.

Copies of the report can be obtained by writing to the Public Higher Education Program, Rockefeller Institute, 411 State Street, Albany, N.Y. 12203. ■

Not A Parody . . .

Excerpt from UMASS Chancellor's memo to the Campus Community:

(f) The Committee should be cognizant of the principles articulated in Strategic Action as they consider appropriate organizations. In particular principles (II), (III), (IV), (V), (VI), (VII), (VIII) are especially relevant.

(I)	Recognize the ongoing imperative for change.
(II)	Work toward blurring boundaries and rendering barriers permeable to make the University more integrative.
(III)	Attend to the ecology of the learning, living and working environment.
(IV)	Foster the continuing evolution from a monocultural to a multicultural and eventually to a transcultural community, valuing the richness and differences of individuals and cultures, yet affirming our common humanity.
(V)	Provide access to opportunity.
(VI)	Focus on human empowerment and enablement to become a more caring institution.
(VII)	Become more externally and internally connected to avoid a zero-sum philosophy, to develop a constituency, and to become more effective and efficient.
(VIII)	Commit to a new environment for learning, discovery and outreach through infrastructural, administrative and organizational renewal, and through creative use of technology.
(IX)	Strive for multidimensional excellence in a realistic array of activities to enhance the influence and viability of the University in the State, the Nation and the World.

These principles are discussed in relation to Student Affairs in Strategic Thinking and in Strategic Action. When I meet with the Committee to deliver the charge, I shall elaborate upon these points in greater detail since they contain some of my views on matters related to life in the University.

(g) In considering the organization of Student Affairs, the principles set forth by Boyer et al. in *Campus Life: In Search of Community* are also valuable. These were adopted by [the Vice Chancellor] in his overall planning for Student Affairs.

A Purposeful Community
An Open Community
A Just Community
A Disciplined Community
A Caring Community
A Collective Community

From *The Chronicle of Higher Education:*

CORRECTION
Tuesday's report said that Andy Katzenmoyer, a linebacker for Ohio State University, regained his elgibility to play football by taking summer classes that included golf and tennis. Mr. Katzenmoyer did not take tennis.

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